

BEATING THE ODDS

My Personal Hell, 1938 to 1945

By Gerry Walter

This report is dedicated
to my wonderful children
Evi, Shirl and Barry

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Introduction

What you are reading is an account of my survival. It is not a historical novel. It is a report of the actual events and is as accurate as my memory permits. All events are real and described exactly as they happened. The dates and places are real and the persons are described as I saw them then and remember them now. I cannot remember some of their names. You will have to forgive me for choosing names that could have been theirs. This is the only thing that's fictional about this report.

As you read about the horror and injustices, and about the actions that Heinz (my brother Henry) and I were forced to take, you may be tempted to sense adventurousness or even heroics. You'd be making a mistake. Once we had decided not just to let things take their turn, but embarked in the attempt to escape, we had to react to each occurrence, guided by fear and the instinct of self-preservation. Not to do so would have amounted to suicide.

Between 1935 and 1945, in the years of Hitler's absolute power over Germany and its occupied territories, more than six million Jews perished at the hands of his henchmen. Each of these genocide victims struggled for survival with all his/her ability. There are some vague estimates about the number of those that succeeded to survive one way or another. Most common estimates are that less than one in a thousand survived the holocaust. Our odds of survival were very slim.

For the past 52 years I have not been able to escape the memory of my involvement in the holocaust.

Not even for a single day. So far I have not been able to tell the whole story to anyone. My brother Henry (Heinz), who lived through it, at my side, is the only one that knows it all. Charlotte, Richard and Adele, who you will meet in the early years of this report, had experiences that are similar to mine, and I know that they understand. Hedl, my wife, friend and companion of over 45 years, has heard most of the incidents. Can she really understand that, which cannot be expressed in words?

It is this doubt of the ability to understand the circumstances and implications, that had prevented me, so far, from making a cohesive report to anyone, be it verbally or in writing. And "anyone" includes my children, who really should know.

Recently I have started to research the history of the times and places of these occurrences, in an attempt to understand the background better. Also I have realized, after so many years, that the wounds that had been inflicted on me, by the horror of it, have not healed and never will. They have influenced my behavior, my life and the lives of my loved ones. By telling the story now I hope to gain some understanding myself and to provide some explanations to my family.

I'm not a religious person, but sometimes I just wonder if there isn't such a thing as a guardian angel. If there were, it could explain many instances of being saved, when it appeared that all was lost.

Should I have taken this account with me to my grave? I don't know. It will answer questions that my children must have wondered about. In time, when our grandson matures into understanding the complexities of life, it may give him a glimpse of his heritage.

I have tried to tell it all without emotions. This was not easy since the horror is still real and the sorrow is deep.

Moraga, California, December 1990

1.

Vienna, Austria

I knew it will not be a good birthday celebration. I was only about a week away from turning 15. Ordinarily we celebrated birthdays with presents and spectacular parties, but now social amenities were luxuries, that we could no longer afford. It was March of 1938, in Vienna, Austria, just ten days after Hitler's occupation.

Father left 10 days ago. He took just one little bag and disappeared. That was after we heard on the radio the cheering of thousands of Austrians. They greeted the entering German Annexation Army in Salzburg, on the border between Austria and Germany. I did not know where father was fleeing to. Maybe mother told Heinz and Kurt, my brothers 17 and 19. I don't remember if father had time to say good-by to me. I remember that I did not expect to see him again.

In Vienna, the cheering hordes were even bigger, louder and more boisterous, than in Salzburg. "Liberation, liberation, liberation!" All red-white-red banners, inscribed with UNITY, that had decorated the government buildings for weeks, were immediately replaced by red-white-black banners reading "One People, One Reich, One Führer!" Over-night the word "Jude" (Jew) and the star of David appeared, inscribed with yellow paint, on the show windows of many stores. This included my father's store.

Mid-mornings of the second day of the annexation we heard the first of many similar loud knocks on the front door of our apartment. Why do fascist police always knock on doors with their bayonet handles, instead of using the door bell? Anna opened the door. Ordinarily she would have first checked through the peep-hole to ascertain who was there. This time there was no need.

Anna was the housekeeper, children's governess, and mothers confidant. She came to our house at age 16, 19 years ago, just after Kurt was born. Anna was about 5 years younger than mother and she had never married. Anna was a Catholic, like most Austrians. Her parents and siblings lived in a small mountain village in Upper Austria.

Mother spent most of her days behind the cash register, in our retail store for lighting fixtures and radios, called *Beleuchtungshaus* Walter. It was Anna that was most active in our upbringing. When we were smaller she was a strict, no-nonsense disciplinarian.

After Anna opened the door she said: "*Grüß Got* (god's greetings) *Herr Franz*, I think your uniform is very becoming." It was the 34-year old son of the building's caretaker, sporting a brown Nazi uniform, complete with swastika armlet, and leather belt with shoulder strap. He also wore a mean-looking gun holster.

Anna knew him well, she had gone out with him on several occasions. He had driven a taxi in Vienna and lived with his parents, the caretakers of the building, in the basement apartment. About a year ago he disappeared. It was rumored, that he had joined the Austrian Annexation Corps in Bavaria, just over the

border in Germany. With Franz (*Herr Boslowicz* to us) were two other men. They looked to be about 10 years younger. Both wore average looking working attire with swastika armbands. Each of them also had a military-type rifle.

The men pushed Anna aside and entered the apartment. "We are here to arrest the Jew Walter," said Franz. Anna explained that *Herr Walter* was not home. As far as she knew, he probably left the country.

Austrians are very formal people. Even after 19 years with the family, Anna always addressed my parents as Mr. and Mrs. Walter. To do otherwise would be considered unthinkable rude. To hear father addressed as the Jew Walter, and mother as Jewess Walter, was a shock to me.

Watching Franz's reaction, made me think that father's flight did not come as a surprise to him. Murmuring something about searching for weapons and explosives, the three Nazis proceeded to go through our apartment. They opened closets, dumped the contents of drawers on the floor, and searched through all our belongings.

Our apartment was on the third floor of a substantial, 6 story walk-up, 100+ year old apartment building. It was typical for a middle-class family in Vienna. We had lived in it for the past 17 years. My brother Heinz and I were born right here, in the double bed of our parent's bedroom, in 1921 and 1923 respectively.

The apartment featured a center hall giving access to two short hallways. It had three bedrooms, one and one-half bathrooms, kitchen, dining room, living room,

and father's study. My parents had, over the years, installed substantial leasehold improvements. The richly decorated dining room, living room, and the study had frescoes ceilings and wall moldings. There were expensive wall coverings, persian rugs on the floors, antique stain-glass windows, elaborate curtains and drapes, and valuable paintings, including a small, genuine Rembrand.

In the living room, which we called the *salon*, stood our Bösendorfer concert piano. Each of the three Walter children had spend many hours practicing on it. Also, there were vases, urns, bronzes, and other choice objects *d'art*, collected by my parents over the years.

This was the apartment that was now being searched by these men. When one of them opened the door to the small bedroom, off the entrance hall, Anna said: "This is my room, keep out of it!" To my surprise he just said: "I'm sorry Miss," and quietly closed the door. I learned that Nazis had unbridled power over Jews, but were very cautious when it came to the rights of non-Jews. Especially of those that were not intimidated by their uniforms and rude behavior.

They spend most of their time in fathers study examining papers. Herr Franz asked mother many questions and took along some file folders.

These men were much more polite and civilized than many others that followed later. I do not remember if they also took along valuable "loot." During the approximately seven more month, that we stayed in our apartment in Vienna, we had many more visits of this kind.

Some Nazis were more brazen than others and took larger and more valuable items. Some came more than once. Anna hid some valuables for us in her room. No Nazi ever entered her room.

From published eyewitness accounts it is evident, that from the first days after the annexation the Nazi policy was to take over Jewish businesses and apartments. They deprived Jews of their livelihood and property, and forced them to emigrate, leaving behind whatever they owned. To speed the exodus, the Nazis subjected Jews to continual harassment. Nazi gangs forced Jews to scrub billboards and sidewalks to remove all traces of Austrian patriotic propaganda. Many victims of such humiliation had to seek hospital treatment. They suffered burns from the sharp lye given to them when they had been ordered to do the cleaning work with their bare hands.

On several occasions the Nazis pushed mother around. As far as I know, she was never seriously harmed. We heard about incidents, where Jews, including females and children, were viciously beaten during such raids. Several were thrown out of windows to their death.

On this first raid, after several hours, the three Nazis seemed satisfied. Herr Franz left mother with the command to notify Nazi headquarters as soon as the Jew Walter returns from his attempt to leave the country. "The border is closed for Jews," he noted. It was a great relief to us, a few days later, when mother's brother received the prearranged phone message. It was from a relative in Lwów, Poland, reporting father's safe arrival.

Soon after the annexation looters broke many plate glass display windows in father's store. Within a week all 14 of them were smashed. Looting continued until the store was completely empty. Eye witnesses told us that the police did nothing to stop the looters. One policeman entered the store to turn off the howling burglar alarm siren. He had to. A tenant who lived in the building complained. The noise kept him awake.

For Aryans Only

On the first day of the annexation, with the arrival of Hitler's troops on March 12, 1938, the news papers and radio stations were full of official announcements, edicts and regulations. One of these was, that as of immediately, all public accommodations are only for Aryans. This included public transport, schools, parks, restaurants, and places of entertainment. It severely restricted the movement of Jews.

For the first few days we did not dare to leave the apartment. Paul Hofman reports, in his 1988 book *The Viennese*:

"In Vienna's streets anyone who was not wearing a swastika risked being mauled by roving gangs of young hoodlums. The Nazi Storm Troupers occupied Vienna's main synagogue. Nearby, on the Morzinplatz off the Danube Canal, the Gestapo installed itself in the two-hundred-and-fifty-room Hotel Metropole and adapted entire floors as detention pens. Within days, the name Hotel Metropole became the synonym for terror and torture."

We all found ourself with a lot of time on our hands. Normally I would be in school during the day. Weekdays, after school and Saturdays, my brothers and I worked in father's store. We were treated as

apprentices and given various jobs to do. We all started helping out in father's store by the time we were 10 years old. Electricity and mechanical operations, such as assembling and wiring chandeliers, installing radio antennas, ground wiring, and such, runs in our blood. We earned pocket money through the 'wages' paid by father. In addition we counted on tips from customers for delivering and, some times, installing items bought in our store.

Most of our relatives lived in Vienna's old ghetto, the 2nd District. There were many relatives, all on my mothers side: Mother's father and stepmother, two brothers with wives and children, and several married and single cousins. They all lived within walking distance of each other. We often visited with our relatives on weekends and we made joint excursions to the Vienna woods or the beautiful Alpine or Danube resorts.

Mother now received many phone calls from these relatives. They reported beatings and other humiliating acts, committed by members of the Austrian Annexation Corps and by local hoodlums.

Mother was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1896 (Rosza J. Weisz). She spoke with a typical Hungarian accent and had a hot Hungarian temperament. Her father (Anton Weisz, born 1867) was an importer/distributor of ladies' silk stockings. One of my uncles (Stephan Weisz) worked for him as a salesman. The other, uncle George, was mothers half brother and was 15 years younger. He still went to university and made some pocket money by playing the violin and saxophone.

Of all my relatives, on my mothers side, George is the only one that I know to have survived the holocaust. He went to Shanghai, China, with his wife Margaret (Grete), and later wound up in Toronto, Canada, a partner in a musical instrument business. Both have died by now.

Father was born in Chernovitz, Rumania in 1892 (Berl Walter). Grandfather (Izac) was an orthodox

Jewish scholar. Grandmother (Ethel) operated a kosher restaurant. Father had a brother and, I think, also a sister. His brother was a soldier in the Austrian army in World War I. He fell on the Russian front in 1916. I do not know what happened to father's sister and parents. I assume that they did not survive. There were also several of father's relatives in Galizia, Poland. Some of these I met in late 1938 in Lwów. I believe they all perished in the holocaust.

Father left his parents home at age 14, when he entered apprenticeship in electrician's and electric motor repair work. He spoke German at home and had no perceptible accent, but did not sound like a Viennese.

Hungary, Rumania, Poland, and several other East-European and Baltic countries belonged to the Austro-Hungarian empire, before the end of World War I in 1918. Before they became independent countries, all these nationalities called themselves Austrians. Vienna, the capital of what used to be the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, was full of accents, and no one cared.

In 1914 father was drafted into the Austrian army with the start of World War I. He was wounded severely (shot through the lungs) just a few weeks later. Father belonged to the first casualties of WW I. He spent months in military hospitals and was released from the army in Vienna in 1915, as an invalid. Father suffered from his wounds for the rest of his life.

My parents married in Vienna in 1917 and father started an electric motor repair business at *Gumpendorfer Strasse 88A*, in *Mariahilf*, the 6th District of Vienna. The business prospered and by 1938 it had grown into one of Vienna's larger lighting equipment and radio stores. Still at the same address, it now occupied the entire ground floor and basement of the building.

Kurt, my oldest brother, was born 1919. Shortly before my brother Heinz's birth in 1921, my parents moved into the apartment at *Gumpendorfer Strasse 36*, about two blocks east of the store.

At the time of the annexation I attended grade 5 (the equivalent of the 9s grade in the U.S.) of the Public Middle School for Boys, on Esterhazy Platz. It was just about 10 minutes walking distance from our apartment. Including this grade, I had 4 more years to go to the *Abitur*, the final exam necessary to attend university. I thought that I would like to become a medical doctor and had a definite liking for mathematics and physics. To my parent's consternation, my grades were passing but poor.

In my class of 39 students were 34 Catholics, 3 Jews, and 2 Protestants. This ratio was about typical for the population of the 7 million inhabitants of Austria. More of the Austrian Jews lived in Vienna than in the rest of the country.

In 1938, according to official accounts, 168,652 persons of the "Mosaic faith" (the Austrian term for the Jewish religion) were registered in Vienna. Most of these Jews lived in the 2nd District. In 1945 the Allied Forces found less than 500 Jewish survivors in Vienna.

I liked school and had many good friends and a few close ones. The other two Jewish boys, the twins Felix and Max Laufer, sons of a designer of ladies shoes, lived close to where I lived. We often walked together to and from school. However not everything in school was pleasant.

Mornings were bad, specifically the first 10 minutes of the school day, which we spent in the home room. The day started with the *Ordinarius* (the home-room teacher) leading the class in the Lord's Prayer. Dr. Krauter was a confirmed anti-Semite and always started with: "Jews and other Heathens to the back of the class!" While the Christians prayed he made sure to show his disapproval of the Jews.

Several times during the school year the roughly 30 Jews that attended this middle school had to fight

off attacks by rowdies. Some of us came away with bloody noses, some with torn clothing, and all with much humiliation.

Usually these donnybrooks occurred Mondays, the day following a sermon by the local Catholic priest focusing on the New Testament's Judas-betrayal of Christ. To keep anti-Semitism alive the Catholic church made sure to point periodically to the guilt of the Christ-killers. This was done in the same manner, as it is still done today, with sermons, passion plays and other "holy" devices.

Leave Austria or Die

There was no doubt, being a Jew meant to either leave Austria, or be killed by the Nazis. We had heard rumors about concentration camps and death marches. No one, not even the Jews believed these rumors, before the annexation. Within one week of experiencing the naked Nazi horror in annexed Austria we did not doubt the veracity of these rumors.

There is always the question why only so very few Jews had the foresight to leave Austria, while it was still possible. At least they should have prepared for the eventuality, by securing a visa to a desirable country, such as Britain, the U.S., Canada, or Australia. Many books published on this question agree: Most Austrian Jews, just like the German Jews before them, just would not believe that the world powers would forsake them.

Of all the "civilized" countries in the world only the Soviet Union, the Republic of Spain, Mexico, Chile, and China lodged official protests against the annexation of Austria by Germany, at the League of Nations. The United States, Britain, France, and most other countries did nothing, except to downgrade their legations in Vienna to consulates.

In 1938 I was 15 years old. I was much occupied with my own world of fantasies, and with a puppy-love crush on Lily, the neighbors 14 year old daughter. I was only hazily aware that mother spent many hours discussing survival schemes with father's lawyer and friend Herr Ellenbogen. She also often consulted with grandfather Weisz and uncle Stephan. Probably our friends the Weizmanns and my brothers Kurt and Heinz also participated in these discussions.

To leave, Austrians needed an immigration visa to the receiving country, and an exit permit from the German authorities in Vienna. Citizens of other countries, Poles for instance, did not need a immigration visa. They were going home. To take any property along, besides what a person had on their body, Jews (regardless of their nationality) needed specific permits from the German authorities.

All foreign consulates - the former legations - were beleaguered by visa seekers day after day, but were generally unhelpful. If they accepted a visa application at all, instructions from the home government had to be awaited. Weeks and month would pass, during which the would-be immigrants wrote letter after imploring letter to international humanitarian organizations, or any contact abroad they could think of.

Kurt spent his time doing just that. He targeted the United States' consulate near St. Stephan's cathedral. It accepted applications, but it required an affidavit from someone living in America who would guarantee the upkeep of the penniless visitor. Kurt's diligence paid off. Somehow one of his many letters reached a man whose family name happened to be Walter. He was listed as an electrician in the New York telephone book. Kurt obtained an affidavit from this total stranger. Finally the American consulate in Vienna issued him an immigration visa to the U.S. He left for New York with all our best wishes.

I have never been able to ascertain, what our family's actual escape plans were. It stands to reason, that my parents would plan for all of us to

escape to the U.S., not only for their eldest son Kurt. I understand why father left so early - he would have been arrested the first few days of the annexation. From what followed some month later, I also understand that his escape was only possible by obtaining a Polish passport. This was not difficult in Vienna, with money and with the right connections.

There is no logical explanation, why father selected Lwów. It had only a small American consulate. Warsaw, the capital of Poland, was the seat of the American legation. If he was going to wait for an immigration visa to the U.S. Warsaw would have been the more logical choice. Since Kurt cannot answer this question, and no one is left to explain this mystery, we'll just never know.

The Weizmanns

Up to the crucial times when they became active participants in our flight plans, I knew the Weizmanns only casually. They were the owners of the photo studio, on the ground floor of our apartment building. Ever so often I may happen to see either Mr. or Mrs. Weizmann in front of the house or maybe in the court yard. We would exchange a friendly nod or some pleasant words. I do not remember having ever been in their studio/store or in their elaborate dark rooms and print rooms, before the annexation.

Then there was Ilse Weizmann, their daughter. She was about the same age as my oldest brother Kurt and he had a thing going with her, as he had with several other young ladies. From the Weizmann's point of view Kurt was 'eligible' and it later became obvious that he may have been the chosen one.

The Weizmanns had many important connections in Vienna and all over the world. I learned from Kurt, many years later, that the Weizmanns also wound up in New York. They managed to take out a substantial part

of their possessions. Ilse married someone, not Kurt, after their arrival in New York.

Probably without the help of the Weizmanns none of us would have made it out of Austria in 1938. In their dark room and print laboratory they performed miracles. The Weizmanns always came up with the necessary documents, at the right time. This enabled us to comply with the difficult restrictions imposed by the Nazis. The restrictions were designed to make exiting for Jews almost impossible. Probably even more important to the Nazis, they were designed to prevent Jews to take any of their belongings out of the country.

Just about the time that Kurt left for America mother arranged to have the most valuable items, that had remained in our apartment, packed into a railroad freight-car-sized container. No doubt, the Weizmanns helped her. I have only the vaguest of recollections about this. It seems to me that these included the Bösendorfer concert piano, the small Rembrand painting, porcelains, objects d'art, and most likely some, or all our valuable table silver, oriental rugs, and other valuable items.

Mother sent this shipment to Kurt's address in New York. Kurt acknowledged the receipt to Heinz and me, when we came to America. Some of the items, including the Rembrand painting, and valuable porcelains and bronzes, were on display at Kurt's apartment, when we arrived. Neither my brother Henry (Heinz) nor I have ever obtained an inventory or an indication of the value of this shipment, which Kurt used solely for his own benefit. To maintain peace and good relations I chose not to take up with Kurt the question of inheritance.

2.

Lwow, Poland

After the annexation of Austria in March, 1938 Hitler gave assurances to "The World" that this would not affect Germany's relations with Czechoslovakia. Ethnic Germans, living in the Sudeten part were clamoring for annexation. The willingness of Britain and France to compel the Czech government to cede the Sudeten areas to Germany presented Hitler with the opportunity to grab one third of Czechoslovakia. He accepted the infamous Munich agreement on September 30, 1938.

We decided to use the turmoil and the victory jubilation of the Germans as the cover for our disappearance from Vienna. We started our flight to Poland, to be re-united with father, in the early morning hours of October 2, 1938. A taxi brought us to the Eastern Railroad Station. We said tearful good-byes to Anna and boarded a train.

Aunt Ella entered our life on this morning of the first day of the two-day journey. She was a small, old lady of about 60 and spoke with a Polish accent. Aunt Ella was introduced to us as father's relative. Since all old lady relatives are affectionately called aunt, I have no clue about the actual relationship.

Mother carried a Polish passport. It covered herself, Heinz, and me. Aunt Ella also had a Polish passport, which probably was the real thing. We had all the required exit permits and travel documents, most likely through the help of the Weizmanns. Each of us had a small suitcase.

The journey was almost uneventful. Our first destination was the German-Polish border crossing at

Ostrava/Bohumin on the way to Kraków. This normally six to eight hours journey took about twenty hours. Trains loaded with German military equipment and soldiers had first priority and kept passing us.

We arrived in Ostrava in the early morning and passed the sleepy German border guard's inspection without incidents or delays. The train moved on for roughly one hundred meters and stopped for the Polish document check. Aunt Ella's knowledge of the Polish language was handy. The Polish custom inspection team consisted of some uniformed men and some in civilian clothes. They asked us to step out of our compartment to present our papers, while inspectors looked at our luggage.

When we stepped back into our compartment aunt Ella's overcoat was gone. Mother had given it to her in Vienna. It was a large, heavy cloth coat. It's lining was mother's expensive ermine fur coat. Aunt Ella complained loudly. She was told that she had to see the station master, but the train would not wait for her and was moving out immediately. We realized that we had been taken. We wondered how often this well orchestrated robbery was repeated on unsuspecting refugees. It was also the first time that I realized that I was now a refugee. I have remained one ever since.

The train soon pulled into the beautiful historic city of Kraków. We had to change for an other train. It was bitterly cold outside. We took the opportunity to shop for a winter coat for aunt Ella.

I felt so happy to be able to walk the streets without fear of being accosted by Nazi hoodlums. Mother phoned father in Lwów and her brother in Vienna to report our escape. I don't remember much about the remaining ride to our final destination, the city of Lwów, in Galizia, the south-eastern part of Poland.

One City, Three People

Father met us at the train station. I was amazed by how much he had changed, in the 8 month since I saw him last. He had lost at least 30 pounds and looked much younger than his 46 years. He was all smiles and assured us that Galizia was a good place for us to live, for awhile. He took us to the apartment that he had prepared at *Ulica Romanowicza 5*, in a respectable part of the city, near the university.

Galizia is the portion of Poland, on the northern slopes of the Carpathians, which was an Austrian crown possession between 1772 and 1918. It's present name is Halicia (there is no letter 'G' in the Ukrainian language). It was acquired in 1945, as World War II bounty, by the U.S.S.R. and incorporated in the Ukraine (per Yalta Accords).

Lwów is an old city, as most European cities are. It was already a trade center in the 12th century and had many different masters. It's possession alternated between Hungary (1190 to 1215), the Mongols (1241), Russia/Ukraine (1260 to 1339), Poland (1340 to 1771), and Austria (1772 to 1918). Between 1918 and 1939 Galizia belonged to Poland. Galicia's capital, the city that was known as Lemberg under Austrian rule, became Lwów. It is now the second largest city in the Ukraine.

In 1939 Lwów had a population of 318,000. Of these roughly one third were Poles, one third Jews and one third Ukrainians. All of them living together less than harmoniously. The Poles held almost all government jobs, and worked in banks and other prestigious white collar occupations. Jews supplied many teachers and professors, many professionals and skilled craftsmen, and dominated the retail and wholesale trade, including the black market and thief's markets. The Ukrainians supplied domestic servants, heavy manual laborers in the city, and owned and operated the farms around the city.

Lwów had many beautiful old churches and temples. The Polish people are predominantly Catholics. The

Ukrainians are Greek Orthodox. Most of the Jews belonged to one of the Orthodox sects. It was not difficult to identify the members of these three ethnic groups by their attire. The Poles dressed in west-Europe style, often in high fashion outfits. Many Jewish men, because of their orthodoxy, wore black suits, beards, side locks, skull caps, and often fur-rimmed black hats. Jewish females often wore dresses of subdued color and kerchiefs on their heads. As a rule, traditional Ukrainians, men and women alike, wore leather boots and richly embroidered linen, cotton or wool costumes.

The official language was Polish, but almost everybody also spoke Ukrainian. The Jews were more or less fluid in Polish and Ukrainian, but spoke Yiddish to each other. We found many older and well-educated Poles that spoke German very well. Generally we did not find it difficult to make ourself understood.

Father had obtained a distributorship for an energy saving commercial lighting system from a Polish manufacturer. His sales office was a room in the apartment that we occupied. He employed one part-time secretary and, with our arrival, two door-to-door salesmen, my brother Heinz and I.

The secretary was a 17 year old German refugee girl. Her name was Adele and she had arrived from Leibzig, Germany, with her parents in 1937. She was still going to high-school in Lwów and worked in fathers office after school. She spoke a flawless Polish, like many young Jewish refugees after about two years in the country. Adele was the same age as Heinz, but we did not know her very well, since she was such a shy little person. We were very surprised and much elated, when we met her again about nine years later, in New York. She had miraculously survived the holocaust, but had lost her parents and all her other relatives.

I remember many hours of working as the assistant to Heinz, trying to sell the electrical light-fixtures to industrial clients. Adele probably made the appointments for us. It did not take many sales to

satisfy father, since the sales were usually large, amounting to dozens of fixtures for an office or show room complex. I believe we must have had some success. In retrospect, this period of aggressive selling, in a language that we were just trying to master, and a culture that was strange to us, gave Heinz and me confidence in our ability to survive.

Here and there we met other refugees. Someone suggested that we should join a German-Jewish refugee club that operated as a chapter of a Zionist organization. By mid-year of 1939 life had settled down to a comfortable routine. We had acquired masses of friends through the refugee club and the Zionist organization. There must have been at least one hundred boys and girls of our age group. Practically all came from Germany. Beside the two of us, I only recall one other person that came from Vienna. Her official name was Charlotte, but we called her Lotte. She was 18, and we became life-long friends.

Father was talking about taking on other distributorships and mother started to exchange visits with relatives. I remember some elderly ladies that came to visit aunt Ella and mother. They were full of well meant advice for Heinz and me. However, the next catastrophe was just around the corner.

Better Red Than Dead

On a mild and sunny Monday afternoon, around 3 P.M. on September 2, 1939 I was walking along one of Lwów's crowded shopping streets. I remember considering the merits of buying a brand new bicycle, vs. the used one, which I could buy, on the thief's market, for a good price.

Literally out of the blue sky three airplanes appeared and I heard loud rattling noises. The crowd of shoppers panicked. I was pushed into a door way. I saw blood spouting from the chest of a man that had fallen

on my right foot. People were screaming. We heard some very loud detonations and the crowd of people pushed into stores and doorways, just to get off the street. Air attack sirens started to screech.

German military airplanes were machine gunning the population and bombing various civilian targets. This daylight attack lasted about 20 minutes. Eight German planes carried out the attack. They left hundreds of dead and wounded in the streets and in burning buildings. The attack was very effective. It totally demoralized the population of the city.

The German forces had crossed the border into Poland on Sunday September 1, shortly before 6 A.M. Bombing and strafing of civilian and military targets had begun an hour earlier. It caught the Polish government by total surprise. The first official announcements of the invasion were made by the Polish authorities more than 36 hours later. All of Poland was just dumfounded.

From that day on we lived under the constant fear of aircraft attacks. The Polish forces installed some anti-airplane guns in the mountains surrounding the city, but we believed them to be totally ineffective. Most attacks occurred during the night. It was a typical scenario to be awakened at 2 P.M. by the sirens and to rush to the building's cellar. It had quickly been transformed into a bunker, with the addition of some wooden benches. Also several buckets for emergency toilets.

Most often we spent about one hour in this bunker, listening to the booms of the artillery and the bangs of the dropping bombs. Many of the older people, which included in my eyes all that were over 30 years of age, prayed quietly, most of the time. They raised their voices in loud prayer, when the bombing sounds appeared to come closer. Charlotte often shared the bunker with Henry and me. For us, the young ones, all this was a great adventure. We must have annoyed the others with our giggles and poor jokes.

As soon as the sirens signaled that it was save to do so, everyone returned to their apartment. On some nights we made more than one trip to the bunker. On others we made none, but were always aware of the probability of a bombing attack.

The papers and the radio were full of stories about the Polish forces defeating the German invaders, and the atrocities against the population perpetrated by Germans. We knew the victory stories to be lies, but were afraid that the atrocities were real. We felt doomed even after Briton and France entered the war on September 3, 1939. Every day railroad cars arrived with wounded Polish soldiers. We heard stories of the gallant Polish cavalry attacking German tanks with drawn sabers. Others told of unbelievably heavy losses on the Polish side because of poor weapons and stupid leadership.

About a week after the first bombing aunt Ella fainted in the bunker. We carried her back up the stairs to her bedroom. She complained about abdominal pain. It took days before we could get a doctor to come and look at her. She needed to be taken to a hospital for tests but all beds were full of wounded soldiers. From then on we had to carry her to and from the bunker. She remained bedridden.

As time wore on, father became more and more distraught. He walked back and forth in his office all day long. Everyone was upset and especially the Jews were near despair. One night a band of Ukrainian hoodlums raided the Jewish quarters, looted stores and set fire to a synagogue. These raids had happened before, but now they seemed like a very bad omen.

Ever since the first bombing it had become increasingly difficult to buy food in Lwów. The large Ukrainian farmers market, which normally was the place where the locals bargained for eggs, milk, cheeses, vegetables, and all kinds of other staples, had shrunken to just a few carts. On the black market Jews peddled prepackaged items, such as 5-kilo bags of rice, at very high prices. Most grocery stores had sold out all their

merchandise or had just closed their doors to the public, doing a brisk under-the-counter business through the back door.

On September 17 the Soviet armies crossed Poland's Eastern frontier. That blow in the back sealed Poland's fate, for there were scarcely any troops there to oppose this second invasion. Suddenly there was hope again. While the Poles were upset over the loss of their country, the Ukrainians rooted for the Germans, hoping through them to get to an independent Ukrainia. The Jews knew that only the Red Army's victory could save them from certain death at the hands of the Germans and their Ukrainian henchmen.

Father sent Heinz and me on a serious food collecting expedition. He reasoned that whatever happens, we will not be able to buy food for weeks or even months. It turned out that his predictions were accurate. We probably would have had a much harder time without the sacks of flower, bags of rice and beans, boxes of apple jam, and other food stuffs, that we bought on the black market and hid in the apartment.

On September 22 a weird quiet fell over the city. For several hours the streets were totally without traffic. At about 3 P.M. we saw the first Russian patrol coming down our street. It consisted of three motorbikes. Each carried two helmeted, scary looking Mongolians. The Red Army was here!

The U.S.S.R. accomplished the occupation of Lwów smoothly and without much Polish opposition. This was quite different from the occupation of Warsaw, where heavy fighting started September 23 and continued until the city fell September 28. Even after the fall of Warsaw considerable Polish fragments did not surrender until October 5 and some Polish partisans kept fighting for month thereafter.

The Russian troops, mostly of Mangolian ethnic background, moved quickly through the city of Lwów. The German and Russian forces met and greeted each other, as

partners on a line that passed 200 kilometers west of us. All that was per secret arrangement between Hitler and Stalin on the mutual partition of Poland.

Right behind the fighting forces came hordes of Russian administrators. Also the communist underground surfaced. It took the form of an army of some Polish, some Ukrainian and many Jewish civilians. They all wore red armbands, some with the crossed hammer and sickle symbol. There was only one difference between these communist civilian opportunists and the Austrian Nazi civilians, I escaped from less than one year ago. The commies were not armed. Otherwise they behaved identically.

Within hours of the occupation huge Russian trucks pulled up to stores and warehouses. They loaded up with all that could be moved, and drove it away, presumably to Mother Russia. After emptying the department stores and warehouses, the procedure was repeated at smaller stores, drugstores, grocery stores, furniture stores, restaurants, cafeterias, etc. The commercial sector of the city was plundered systematically and mercilessly.

All commercial life stopped for at least three weeks. In retrospect, it was surprising that electricity and telephone services continued to be available. All private property was declared illegal.

Aunt Ella, Rest In Peace

During this time aunt Ella died. She had been getting progressively weaker and we found her dead in her bed one morning. She was a devout Jew but there was no possibility to have a service for her. Father collected mother, Heinz and me around her bed. We put on our hats and father said some Hebrew prayer words, and that was that.

With the help of the buildings caretaker, an elderly Ukrainian who lived in the basement apartment,

father fashioned a narrow casket from some crates. The casket was just large enough to fit Ella's corps, laying on her back. The boards for the casket's cover were a little short. After we nailed down the cover, Ella's feet could be seen, toes up.

We borrowed a two-wheeled cart and Heinz and I set out to the Jewish cemetery, which was a few miles away, on the edge of the town. It was bitterly cold and we had thrown an old blanket over the casket. We could not tie the blanket down since we had no string. The wind kept blowing it aside, exposing aunt Ella's bare feet. This picture keeps coming back to me, in my nightmares, ever so often.

At the cemetery the doors and windows of the little chapel had been broken. Many caskets and about a dozen corpses, partially wrapped in sheets, were piled on the floor. The gravediggers must have left weeks ago. There were no tools to be found. Even if we would have found some picks and shovels, it would have been impossible to dig a grave in the frozen earth.

We put aunt Ella's casket on the floor next to the naked corps of an emaciated young woman. We used the blanket to cover this corps.

What Is Bourgeois?

Converting from a capitalist society to Stalin's communism was not easy. We were taught that after the communist revolution only two classes of citizens remained: The proletarian (industrial and agricultural workers) class and the bourgeois class. The proletarians work for the state. They work in state owned factories or cooperatives. Proletarians are also employed in the armed forces, in the police (called peoples militia), and in the communist bureaucracy. Membership in the communist party is reserved for proletarians, but is not obligatory. All others, such as owners of (now confiscated) factories, apartment

houses, farms, stores, and all other "exploiters" belong to the bourgeois class. They are subject to prosecution, soon to be deported to the prison camps in Siberia, where the average life span was less than three years.

While the warehouses and stores were plundered during the day, the terror of the night-time arrests of the bourgeois spread like a cancer over all, but the very poor. Karl Marx borrowed the term bourgeois from the French revolution. Webster's definition is: *"One with social behavior and political views held to be influenced by private-property interest."* To be a bourgeois in Stalin's communist Russia was quite as bad, as being a Jew in Hitler's Nazi Germany.

Guided by the local communists, the Russian militia arrested hundreds of families in Lwów, during the nights that followed the take-over. They seized their belongings and trucked the "loot" away, usually on the night of the arrest. Most were never heard from again. Rumors had it that these bourgeois were killed near the Polish/Russian border and buried there, in mass graves.

Father was fully aware that, based on his life in Austria, we belonged to the bourgeois class. We anxiously listened for the noise of a stopping truck in the night, during this critical period. Thank God, it never came.

We quickly took steps to become proper proletarians. Father got together with a group of refugees with experience in electrical manufacturing. They submitted plans to open a cooperative to manufacture electrical cooking stove elements and started working within a few weeks. Father told Heinz and me to do the next best thing: "Go to school to continue your education."

Heinz was accepted as a freshman in Lwów's famous University. I started in mid-year, in the eleventh grade of Lwów's Yiddish high-school. The contingency was that I had to pass, within six months, a language test in

Yiddish and Ukrainian. This meant to gain proficiency in two new alphabets. Yiddish is written with Hebrew letters and Ukrainian uses the Cyrillic alphabet. I settled down to some serious studying.

Some kind of normality settled in our disrupted life. First some bakeries started to sell loaves of dark bread, for which one had to stand in queues for hours. Later other groceries became available, but also only by standing in line for them. Everyone quickly learned to wear old and visibly worn-down clothes (we called them "the ditch-digger uniform"), not to be mistaken for a bourgeois.

Our apartment was declared too big for only the four of us. We had to give up one of our bedrooms to a Russian civilian. Several Russians came and went, but we never knew much about them. Fear, the driving force in a police state, prevents people from getting to know each other.

It was not all work, however. School turned out to be most satisfying. There were about twenty boys and girls in my class and we had none of the tensions that I remembered from Vienna. After I mastered the new languages, I enjoyed the excellent teachers and the full curriculum. The history of the Russian revolution was a pain, but the teacher, a young Ukrainian girl from a village deep in Russia, was a joy. There wasn't a boy in this class that did not have a crush on her.

Many of our friends from the refugee club resurfaced. We also met some new ones. Heinz and I met with Lotte and Richard (Lotte's boyfriend) almost every day. They also studied at the university. Lotte rented a room near my parents apartment. We joined a glee club organized by Avi, a German refugee musical genius. He taught us the beautiful songs of Ukraine, mixed with German, Austrian and English drinking songs. Some evenings there must have been fifty or more of us participating.

On May 15, 1940 Lotte and Richard got married. They went to city hall during the lunch break, got

married, and did not even miss the next lecture at the university. I borrowed, without mother's knowledge, some of our good china, glasses, silver and a table cloth. I also "borrowed" some food stuffs from mother's secret supply. In addition, Heinz and I stood in line at the wine store and confectionery. Ruth, my girlfriend, cooked the wedding dinner in the kitchen of Charlotte's landlord. It must have been a good wedding dinner, since Lotte and Richard are still married 50 years later.

In March 1941, after my eighteenth birthday, unexpectedly three of mother's cousins from Vienna showed up at our apartment in Lwów. Two of them were bachelors, about 25 years old. The third was over 30 and had left behind a wife and two children. They had been picked up by the Nazis in Vienna about one week earlier, while standing in line at the American consulate. They were there, because a consular employee had phoned them to come and discuss matters about their visa applications. (The U.S. maintained a consulate in Vienna until December 1941.)

Once they were arrested, together with hundreds of other Jews standing in line at the consulates of various countries, they were stripped of all valuables and loaded into railway freight cars. They were convinced that they would be taken to a concentration camp. Instead, the cars stopped at the German-Russian dividing line near Sambor in Galizia. "Run across the border, or get shot dead," said the Nazis. On the Russian side they were given temporary identification papers, by the Russian authorities, and asked if they had relatives or friends that would take them in.

The three cousins, whose names I have forgotten, moved in with us. They camped out in father's office, which originally was the apartment's living room. From them we heard about terrible conditions in Vienna. Most Jews had been driven from their original apartments and forced to live in a small ghetto in the 2nd District. All food was now only obtainable with ration cards.

Jews were entitled to only half of the meager rations. Whatever money, jewelry, or other marketable possessions they still owned had to be used to buy food on the black market.

Mother's parents (my Hungarian grandparents) would have starved to death by now, if not for Anna. She went to their apartment once a week and brought some food to sustain them. No one knew how long she could keep this up. Poor mother cried, and cried.

June 22, 1941 Hitler attacked the Soviet Union without provocation. Bombs were falling again in Lwów. The Red Army, totally unprepared, withdrew behind the original Polish-Russian borders. The Russian civilians just disappeared.

3.

Tarnopol, Poland

Heinz and I were prepared to flee within hours of the first bombing attack. There was only one logical destination. We had to get out of Poland, into the U.S.S.R. This meant we had to go east, taking the same course as the invading German army. Could we stay ahead of Hitler's forces? We hoped so.

It also meant that we will have to serve in the Red Army, fighting for Stalin against Hitler. After all, we now were Soviet citizens, our personal passport said so. It also said: "Nationality - Jew."

Mother packed a suitcase for each of us. We took one change of clothes, some personal items, and some food. We quickly said our good-byes and ran off to the central train station.

Hundreds of others, including some Russian civilians, and even a few soldiers had the same idea. Nobody knew if or when the next train would leave. We hung around until after dark. Suddenly there was a stampede towards a passenger train that was standing on one of the freight loading platforms. We scrambled into one of the wagons through the window, and just sat there. The compartment was so full that soon some person was sitting on my lap and I couldn't do a thing about it. I heard people moving around on the roof of the car. We just sat there and waited.

Shortly after midnight the train started to creep towards the main tracks. Once it reached them, the speed increased ever so slightly. We could not have gone for more than one hour, when we heard shots and detonating grenades. Then we heard the sounds of approaching airplanes. Panic broke out. We heard bombs and firing

of machine guns. The compartment's window got smashed. Everybody pushed to get out of the train. We left our jackets and suitcases behind and jumped out through the broken window.

We scrambled away from the train, running for all we could, up the embankment and toward some trees. By the time we reached this little orchard, a few minutes later, the German military planes had passed over the train and several wagons were burning. The locomotive was laying on its side.

We were happy to be alive. People, stuck in the train, were screaming. The airplanes came back again and fired at the passengers that surrounded the train. There also was gun fire coming from the other side of the railroad embankment. It was directed at the passengers, adding to the casualties and the confusion.

We kept under cover in the little orchard, and we were cold. In the distance we could see, just on the horizon, the lights of the suburbs of Lwów.

Early mornings of June 23, just about 15 hours after we had left, we were back in our apartment. We had walked back, keeping under the cover of trees, as much as possible.

Our parents were glad to see us and sad that we had failed. The news in Lwów was that the Germans were approaching unopposed. They were expected to take the city within days. (Actually Lwów fell June 30, 1941)

We were determined to try again. We had learned some lessons. We would have to stay away from public transportation and from all well traveled highways, to avoid attacks by German airplanes, and by Polish or Ukrainian partisans. We realized that the first shots and detonations we heard on the train, did not come from the Germans. The train's compartment window was smashed by rocks thrown by partisans. There was more than one enemy to look out for. We also realized that we had to have the proper clothes and equipment.

After a day of rest and a few good meals, we changed into camping outfits. We each filled a backpack with underwear, one extra pair of hiking shoes, a loaf of bread, and some other food. We also carried a blanket, a water bottle, and several maps. To keep the weight down we took along only what we deemed absolutely necessary.

We decided we must get to Tarnopol, the border town to the U.S.S.R., about 80 miles due east of Lwów. We decided to take the most direct county roads, avoiding the highway. From Tarnopol, we thought, it should not be difficult to get deeper into Russia.

On June 25, around noon we once again said good-bye to parents and friends. Reaching the suburbs we realized that we were not the only people fleeing east. The Roads were crowded with hikers and horse-drawn vehicles. Occasionally even an automobile, filled with Soviet civilians, honked its way along these county roads.

Almost immediately strafing airplanes dove from the sky. All I remember of these first few hours on the road is running, hiding, and running again. We used our compass and wound up hiking across the fields, from tree cover to tree cover, rather than using the roads that were turning into battle fields.

With nightfall the danger from the air attacks diminished. We picked up a strong tree branch. Each of us whittled it into something resembling a walking stick. We needed these clubs to protect ourself from new and unexpected nemeses: The mean dogs that are around every farm.

Progress was slower than we had expected. By the time the sun came up we had barely covered half the distance to Tarnopol. We dodged into a barn and hid in the hay loft to rest our aching feet, eat some food and wait out the day.

Around noon it got very hot in the hey loft and we woke up, hearing voices in the barn. The farmer's wife

was talking to three young orthodox Jews. "I have brought you some soup and bread," she said. "But you cannot stay here. You must move on as soon as you have finished your food. The local rowdies will burn down the barn if they find you here, please go!"

The soup smelled so good, but we decided it would be bad, if we would associate with these poor souls. Their beards, side locks, scull caps and black clothes advertised that they were Jews.

We knew that we did not exactly look like the reincarnation of the Aryan race. We both were rather skinny fellows, 18 and 20 years old, about 5'10", 130 lb., with brown hair and dark eyes. I wore wire-rimmed glasses, which partially corrected my cross-eye affliction. Heinz has a darker complexion, inherited from our Hungarian mother. He has a very visible scar and dent in his forehead, from an accident when he was 13 years old. From our clothes, mannerism and accents, locals would know that we were strangers. We hoped they would not immediately brand us as Jews.

We stayed hidden until it was almost dark outside. Before leaving we shaved, as good as we could manage, using the last few drops of water from our bottles. We left the barn and started walking east again.

For the first few hours it was unusually quiet and peaceful. After midnight we heard some individual rifle shots, which seemed to be echoed by other rifle shots coming from different directions. Towards morning we came closer to the highway. We heard the continuous hum of motor vehicles. After a while we decided to take a cautious look at the highway.

Well hidden in some bushes, near a little bridge over a river, we had an excellent view of the highway. What we saw made us feel sick. As far as the eye could see there were columns of military vehicles, trucks, armored personnel carriers and motorcycles with sidecars. All of them were German! The Germans had beaten us to Tarnopol. All was lost.

Come Back Tomorrow

Military Government Headquarters (MGHQ, called *Kommandatur* by the Germans) was housed in an impressive building. We were told later that the building, was originally a convent and Catholic parochial school. It had been confiscated by the Red Army and made into a military administration complex, after the nuns had been thrown out. At the time of our arrival, the Germans were just moving in and trying to cope with the incredible mess left there by the fleeing Russians.

After what seemed to be hours, Sergeant Kraus walked into the little office. He took off his helmet, breast plate with the inscription "Military Police", and belt with gun holster and the mean looking bayonet. All-over sudden he looked like a friendly middle-aged man.

He had brought with him Sergeant Glupke, who he introduced as the Chief Clerk for the Judge Advocate, also taking care of enlisted personnel matters. Sergeant Glupke, at this first meeting, did not utter a single word, but kept writing busily.

We repeated our story. Sergeant Glupke gave us paper and pencils, to write down names and addresses. For our last address we wrote *Zentralstraße 36* in Gdansk/Danzig. We figured every city had a Center street, the equivalent of Main Street, in the U.S.

We used the real names for our parents. The name of the bad stepmother was Ella (sorry aunt Ella). The name of the lost uncle was Stephan, etc.

Next, Sergeant Glupke asked about our language proficiency and our office skills. He seemed real pleased with our answers. We kept feeling better. Sergeant Kraus asked: "Are you hungry?" We admitted that we had not eaten for a day. He cranked the telephone and spoke into it. A soldier appeared with four large meat sandwiches and a pitcher of tea.

While we were eating Sergeant Kraus had a long telephone conversation in a subdued voice. We could not hear what he was saying. We were almost finished with the last sandwich when he said: "It's too late to contact Danzig now, but we'll send them a telegram and will have a verification of your story by morning. I sure hope that it all checks out." All over sudden his face did not look so benevolent. "If what you told us is not the truth, we will find ways to make you wish you had never said a word to us. Anyway, you'll have to come back tomorrow morning, and we will continue then."

The last bite of food got stuck in my throat. Heinz got pale. We found ourself out on the street. We walked to the end of the block and turned left. Out of sight of headquarters we stopped and looked at each other. Here we thought it was going so well. All-over sudden we were sinking into quicksand. We knew that we could never go back to Military Government Headquarters.

While we stood there, as if struck by lightning, we realized that the sun just started to settle. We had spent many hours at Military Government Headquarters and now we needed a place to stay overnight. As we strolled down the street we passed a deserted bar. The entrance door and window was broken. The front room was empty, but for some broken chairs. We recognized the signs of a plundering mob.

In the back there was a large meeting room, also almost empty, except for a smashed upright piano. In the wall farthest from the door we noticed a large waist-high built-in cabinet with doors that were torn from their hinges. The cabinet had a strong center shelf and was big enough for Heinz to sleep on the bottom shelf and for me above him. We moved the upright piano in front of the cabinet. It was just wide enough to hide the opening. We were asleep in minutes.

Both Heinz and I had bad nightmares full of screams, running feet and gun shots. We woke, after having slept for almost twelve hours, with sore muscles all over. All the hiking and running of the past two days took its toll.

We noticed that the shelf we had slept on was very dirty. Our clothes were a mess. We had not brought a clothes brush, nor did we have a shoe brush or polish. We shook out our clothes as good as possible and tried to clean our shoes with some newspaper. There was a cold water tap behind the bar. We used it to shave without much care.

We decided to return to our parents and friends in Lwów. Whatever the future held for us, it would be easier to face within our family.

Heinz walked a step or two ahead of me, as we started to leave our shelter. He stopped and I heard him say: "Oh my God!", under his breath. Laying in the entrance way to the bar was a half naked corpse. One eye open, the other swollen shut, his beard bloody and one side-lock torn off, mouth frozen into a gruesome shape. He had no pants, no shoes, and was surrounded by a puddle of coagulated blood. As we stepped over the corpse we noticed that his genitals had been cut off.

On the street to our right, we saw several more corpses. Two young women were laying there, totally naked, with the star of David carved into their abdomen. More corpses farther down the street. Dante's Inferno. . .

Now the noises of the night, which we thought a part of our nightmares, made sense to us. We had stumbled into the ghetto, in our search for shelter. The plundered bar was part of it. During the night we had slept through a raid by local hoodlums.

All we could think of was to get out of there, without calling attention to ourselves. However, it was not to be. Before we could reach the main street, only a block away, five hoodlums stepped from a doorway. One was a young woman, screeching on top of her voice: "Jews, Jews, we got us some Jews!" The largest of the four sinister men had a switchblade knife. He waved it before our faces. I felt someone tucking at the blanket on my backpack.

Heinz said in German to the hoodlums: "No, you are mistaken, we are ethnic Germans on the way to the *Kommandatur*." "Jews! - Jews!", said the hoodlum with the knife. He thought we were speaking Yiddish. They pushed us against the wall and one of them started to take my shoes off.

At this moment we saw them. Two German soldiers had been attracted by the noise. They were standing on the opposite side of the street, watching. "Help us, please," we called out in German, "we are Germans on the way to MGHQ. Sergeant Kraus of the military police is waiting for us. Tell these people to let us through, please!" The hoodlums stopped with what they were doing. The Germans looked at each other. One shrugged his shoulders. The other walked over towards us and waved the hoodlums off. They yielded reluctantly. The soldier said: "We'll escort you to MGHQ, it's just around the corner."

Sergeant Kraus said: "There you are! You must have overslept. You have no time for breakfast. You got a clean bill of health from Danzig. Governing Counsel Schröder wants to see you now." We were dumbfounded. The murderous hoodlums had forced us to call the German's bluff. I felt like crying, but somehow I kept a straight face. "Governing Counsel Schröder has the rank of Colonel," Sergeant Kraus informed us, "he is the senior military administrator and reports directly to the CO., Brigadier General von Hessenick."

Penis Inspection

Before seeing Governing Counsel Willy Schröder, Sergeant Kraus instructed us on how to stand at attention: "Keep your belly in and your chest out." Next he called a military policeman to take our backpacks into storage and had us frisked for concealed weapons ("Sorry boys, this is standard procedure"). He looked at our pocket knives, shrugged his shoulders and

gave them back to us. We entered Governing Counsel's office and Sergeant Kraus bellowed at us: "Attention!" Colonel Schröder smiled and said: "At ease, thank you Sergeant Kraus, you can leave now."

Colonel Schröder was about six foot tall and very slim. He had the look of an aristocrat, monocle and all. We judged him to be in his early fifties. He spoke with a Weimar accent. His home was in a suburb of the beautiful medieval city of Weimar, near Erfurt, in Thüringen. He wore the well tailored uniform of a General-Staff officer, gray riding pants, with leather seat, shiny riding boots, brown leather belt and shoulder strap. His chest was decorated with several rows of campaign ribbons. He was always addressed as Herr Governing Counsel.

The Chief Clerk for the Judge Advocate, Sergeant Glupke, who we befriended later, explained to us the significance of Colonel Schröder's Weimar background. The city of Weimar generally, and the Weimar bureaucracy specifically, represented the center of German liberalism. In Weimar in July 1919 the constitution of the new German republic was adopted by the national assembly and became known as the Weimar Constitution. It provided, for the first time in German history, a firm foundation for democratic development. The so-called Weimar Republic started to crumble in 1923, but many German bureaucrats blamed Hitler's actions in 1930 for the total destruction of this idealistic form of government. Colonel Schröder, a high-ranking career civil servant and Weimar bureaucrat was not a Nazi sympathizer.

I was not aware of all this during these initial crucial days of our entry into this underground existence. Heinz and I have often wondered what could have been the reason for Schröder's obvious risk taking to shield us and to save our lives. He must have known that our story was concocted and that he exposed himself by being our 'patron' from the very beginning. Besides being an exceptionally decent man, he may have enjoyed fooling the Nazis.

"You boys have been camping out. You smell ripe. Let's go and get you a shower. Also you need some clean clothes," said Governing Counsel. He led the way to Sergeant Major Krabic's quarters. Here soap, towels, underwear, and fatigues were issued. "Come back after 1600 hours and we'll see if we can find some uniforms for you," said Sergeant Major.

Next Governing Counsel Schröder walked ahead of us to the showers. I wondered how much time he was going to spend on us, and if he had nothing better to do than to give us a shower. "Get your clothes off and let's take a piss at the urinal," he said. At that moment Heinz and I suddenly understood what this was all about. Schröder had to convince himself that our penises were whole, in other words, that we were not circumcised.

In Europe, unlike in the U.S., only Jewish and Muslim boy babies are circumcised, a ritual operation of cutting away the whole or a part of the foreskin of the penis. For the Jews it represents the fulfillment of the covenant between God and Abraham (Genesis XVII, 10-14), the first divine command of the Pentateuch, that every male child shall be circumcised. Christians are not obliged to be circumcised. In the U.S. mostly all boy babies, regardless of their parents religion, are routinely circumcised in the hospitals. This is considered a hygienic procedure, beneficial in the prevention of infections.

My parents obviously did not believe in this practice and none of us three brothers are circumcised. I do not know if this was a conscious act of foresight (once circumcised one is "marked as a Jew for life") by my parents, or just father's rebellion against any religious rules.

After Governing Counsel Schröder had convinced himself that we had no external markings of being non-Aryan he left us to our delicious showers. Later we were introduced to the enlisted men's cafeteria and were shown to the dormitories.

At 1600 sharp we presented ourselves to Sergeant Major Krabic. "We are a small outfit," he said, "there's only a limited number of uniforms that we keep on hand. Look through this stack and see if you can find some that fit." We selected well worn jackets and pants, bypassing some new ones, since we wanted to blend in with the rest of the soldiers.

We were told that we had to remove all German insignia from the uniform pieces. We were civilians and the uniforms were only given to us since we had no other serviceable clothes. No weapons were issued to us at that time, but we received steel helmets and gas masks. We felt we had accomplished a lot and were quite comfortable in our new camouflage. After all, we had left Lwów only four days ago.

In Germany one can almost always pinpoint a person's birth place by his/her accent. Some accents are so distinct that they can be immediately identified. Unfortunately, the Austrian accent is one of them. Starting with our first contact with Sergeant Kraus at the bridge over the Tarnopol river, we forced ourselves to speak without an accent that would be traceable to a province of the greater German Reich. This was not easy, but we accomplished it, by imitating the way father spoke German. He was born in Rumania and spoke German with East-European undertones. We never fell back into the Austrian dialect, even speaking to each other. Even Austrians did not question our story of being born in an ethnic German colony in Russia.

Government Interpreter

The next day happened to be a Saturday and we were told to report to Governing Counsel Schröder after lunch for indoctrination and work assignments. Some month later we learned that we showed up at MGHQ at a very opportune time. Both, the Governing Counsel and the Judge Advocate (who also had the rank of Colonel)

had urgently requested, from the Regimental Administration in Potsdam, the transfer of two Government Interpreters. Not even translators, proficient in Ukrainian and Russian, were available. Interpreters, who were expected to have knowledge in administrative procedures, besides the language skills, were very scarce. Our appearance at the door of MGHQ was considered a very lucky coincidence.

In this indoctrination meeting Governing Counsel told us that we would report directly to him. We would be assigned to duties in his Military Government Division and lent out, when necessary, for duty to the Court Martial Division (under Judge Advocate Krautmann) and to the Military Police. Our first assignment was to organize and operate a counter for the issuance of Travel Permits for local citizens. We were shown the regulation issued by Government Counsel, prohibiting travel without a valid Travel Permit issued by MGHQ. It was expected (correctly) that the following Monday hundreds of people will line up at MGHQ to apply for such permits.

We were to verify the applicants documents and to prepare the permits. We were to have them signed and stamped by a police Lieutenant and were to issue them to the applicants.

Schröder also told us that we would be paid a salary. Also that we will be allowed to buy, from the paymasters office, certain necessities. These included 100 cigarettes or one packet of pipe tobacco per bi-monthly pay-period. This made Heinz very happy. He had started to smoke a pipe, when he had entered university some 18 month ago.

After all these pleasant news Governing Counsel became very serious. "It is matter of record" he said, "that your identification documents were destroyed by an act of war. You are not blamed for this. You must produce acceptable I. D. documents as soon as possible. I understand that the area of your birth, and the place where your family is known, is in a Russian territory that has not yet been occupied by German troops. Within

three month, or if possible sooner, we must have documentary proof of your identity and ancestry. Do not take this lightly and start working on it as soon as possible." This put a damper on our spirits.

We were actually only 18 and 20 years old. Today, especially in the U.S., men of this age are often not yet considered grown-up, and behave accordingly. In Europe men assume the full responsibilities of grown-ups earlier. This was even more so, some fifty years ago, than it is today. In our case, possibly because of our early hardships, we not only behaved mature, but also looked much older. We were given assignments and responsibilities that belied our ages.

For the next two month we had our hands full, issuing each day an average of thirty or more travel permits to local citizens. Soon the police Lieutenant found it too troublesome to sign these papers one-by-one. He was much more interested in the German nurses in the nearby field-hospital, where he spend much of his days, and probably nights. Lieutenant Knabe pre-signed batches of hundred permits and left it to us to fill-in the particulars.

Seeing so many applicants every day and angering some that did not fit the permissible profile for issuance of a permit, we were uneasy about being recognized by someone. Very few applicants presented I.D. papers that showed that they were Jews. Whenever this happened we pointed out, that we needed another identification. When a person submitted a Soviet passport, which said: "Nationality - Jew," we would say that we needed some other I.D., such as a student card, renter's card, etc. The applicants always understood and withdrew the passport or the application. Most of these poor souls asked for permission to get back to Lwów, to attend to a sick relative, etc. It was heartbreaking to see all these young people, who missed the boat, as we did ourselves.

While here and there we thought to have seen a vaguely familiar face, we did not meet anyone that we could identify, and more importantly, that identified

us. We never heard of any rumors, which we feared so much, suggesting that two Jewish boys were masquerading in German uniforms in MGHQ.

In the second half of August three important things happened:

1. We were told that by August 30. the Military Government Headquarters was going to move farther east, to the county seat Talnoye, about 250 miles farther into the Ukraine. We were expected to move with MGHQ (thanks God).
2. Heinz was badly burned in an accidental fire in a warehouse and I had to check him into hospital.
3. I decided to take advantage of an opportunity that came along, to travel to Lwów and visit with our parents.

The German *Panzer* (tank) Divisions were pushing hard to reach the Dnepr river before November, the traditional onset of the heavy rains in the south (and snow in the north), which make troop movements almost impossible. There was only weak opposition by Russian motorized troops. The main Russian defenses were employed to keep Leningrad, far to the north, from being taken. It was an open secret, in MGHQ, that our final destination was Zaporoshye, a large city on the Dnepr, famous for a very large dam and hydro-power station.

Heinz Goes To Hospital

As the German troops advanced toward the east, all administrative and supply units were drawn up and MGHQ was going to move into temporary holding quarters in Talnoye. In preparation for this move, Heinz and I were

to determine how much truck space will be needed for office supplies. To check supplies we went to a warehouse shed in the rear of MGHQ, which was filled with office and cleaning supplies.

For some unknown reason the electricity was off and the shed was totally dark. To see in the darkness we rolled up some papers and made torches. As my torch burned down to my fingers I threw it into a barrel that I thought was empty. Heinz stepped into the barrel to squash the flame. It turned out that the barrel contained a small amount of inflammable liquid. Heinz immediately turned into a flaming torch.

He ran outside. We were able to extinguish the burning trouser around his right leg, but not before he suffered second degree burns on his foot, ankle and lower leg. The shed went up in flames, which did not bother me. The burns were bad and Heinz spend about three weeks in a hospital. I still have strong guilt feelings, every time I think of this incident, or whenever I see the burn marks on Heinz's leg and foot.

Visiting The Parents

On August 27, 1941, just three days before I was to move with MGHQ farther into the Ukraine, one of the military police Sergeants told me he was going to drive a light truck to a brewery in Lwów, to pickup two barrels of beer. It was for some police bash upon our arrival at the new location. He was not sure that the brewery personnel spoke German and, as a favor to him and the other fellows, I should come along. I took him up on it.

We started early and got the beer without much delay. By 11 A.M. the truck was already parked in a lot behind the SS headquarters, which occupied one of the better hotels in Lwów. Police Sergeant Tony Hebermeyer's brother was a SS-Lieutenant. He had

graciously offered to let us share his room in the hotel, for one night. My parents apartment was about ten or so blocks from the hotel and I was dying to see them.

It was slightly drizzling. I wore a borrowed military policeman's rubber rain coat and I put on my steel helmet, so not much of my face was visible. After a brisk walk I knocked on the door of my parent's apartment. Father opened the door and I pushed into the apartment, closing the door behind me. I took my helmet off. Father was white as a sheet. "You are crazy," he said. "You should have called first, someone could have been here." Mother was very collected, but the warm reception that I had dreamed off was not forthcoming. "I just can't get over the uniform," said father, and this summed it all up.

We sat down at the table. There was no coffee, and none of mothers usual baked goodies. "Every piece of food we buy comes from the black markets and costs it's weight in gold." Father started to account the whereabouts of friends and relatives. "Richard was caught on the street a week ago. He is in the assembly camp outside of Lwów. Lotte is going crazy. She is going in there by herself just to be with him. Bruno (a cousin) was picked up in the market and put on a truck. As the truck pulled away Bruno fell out and was killed by the guards. Anna managed to send a note from Vienna: Mother's father and stepmother died of starvation in their room in the ghetto . . ."

It went on and on. "What are your plans?" I finally managed to say, to break the gruesome litany. Father smiled and turned to the dresser behind him. He lifted a shoe box from the drawer and took off the cover. The shoe box was half full of jewelry. I saw mothers pearls, ivory, amber and diamond necklaces, her rings and brooches, fathers rings, and some pieces that I did not recognize. "When they come, I give them a piece. As long as they know that there is more to come, they do not take us away."

We hugged and we cried. I had to go. I said: "I'll see if I can come once more tomorrow." "Make sure to call first," said father. It was the last time I saw them.

Back at the hotel Tony's brother, SS-Lieutenant Fritz Hebermeyer, invited us to the sauna, the hotel's outstanding feature. It was in the basement and quite luxurious.

We got undressed and slipped into little cotton underpants, which were provided. Then we moved into a hall with wet and dry sweat rooms on one side and showers on the other. In the middle there was a small swimming pool.

A table at the entrance was piled high with towels. At the end of the table stood two girls, handing the towels to the men, as they entered. One of the girls stared at me. It was Ethel Margulis. She had been a student in my class in Yiddish high-school. Ethel was small and slim. She had won the sweater-queen title for two consecutive years. I noticed that she was barefoot and wore something that looked like a night gown with a belt, no brassiere, but too much make-up.

I moved passed her as fast as I dared, just short of running, and ducked into the first wet sweat room. I had not taken a towel. I sat down on the floor, instead of the steps, since it was very hot. All I could think off was: "What do I do now?"

The cold water hit me like a whip. Tony had emptied a bucket over me. "Hey," he said, "you can't fall asleep here, it'll kill you. Get out of here and take a shower." I carefully left the wet room, looking toward the table with the towels. A third girl had joined the two others. She had chestnut brown hair and an athletic build. I could only see her back. Could it be my girl friend Ruth? Was I hallucinating? What else do they make these girls do, besides giving out towels?

I entered the shower stall and turned on the cold water. It was painful and soothing at the same time. I still had no towel. As I came out of the shower stall the girls were nowhere to be seen. I ran out into the dressing area and got into my clothes, wet as I was. I quickly left the basement sauna installation. Somehow, without looking left or right, I got to the elevator and up to my room. The cot was made up and I crept under the blankets, dressed as I was.

Some time during the night I must have undressed (we slept in our underwear). I woke around 7 A.M., just as the brothers Toni and Fritz came in. They were drunk and told boisterous stories about strippers and prostitutes.

I had breakfast and studied the German paper. It was full of victory stories. On the back page I noticed a story about a Jew who was discovered masquerading as a messenger for a German army postal service unit, in a little town in Silesia. It was all I needed.

Around 10 A.M. I called father's telephone number. He answered promptly, having waited by the phone for my call. "You can't come," he said, "the building's super (who lived in the basement apartment below us) recognized your voice. He now behaves like our jailer. I gave him a fork and a tea-spoon from our silver tableware. He took them and thought he may have been mistaken." Mother came on to the phone. "Give my love to Heinz" she said, "and to your brother Kurt, when you see him, don't forget!"

There was nothing to do in the hotel. I just sat in the hotel room and waited for 4 P.M. to come around. Then we got into the truck and drove back to Tarnopol. I got back in time to visit Heinz in the hospital. I did not dare to tell him much, the beds were so close together. We sat there and held hands. He understood.

4.

Orkenhof, Ukraine

The move to Talnoye was uneventful. I had left Heinz in the hospital. He would be released as soon as his burn wounds healed sufficiently and there was no more danger of infections. MGHQ moved into temporary quarters. My assignment was to work with the Court Martial Division.

An investigation and trial was under way involving black-market dealings of several German and Rumanian supply officers with Ukrainian grain and livestock cooperatives. I was busy with translating oral testimony and volumes of documents and records.

The local police chief was helping with the investigation. I met with him several times. He had only a very rudimentary knowledge of the German language. He appreciated my helping him with the language aspects of the reports he had to submit to the court. We became friends.

One evening he invited me for supper at his apartment. Afterwards, as is the local custom, we started talking over a glass of home-brewed vodka. He showed me pictures of his family and started to tell me about his background. Chief Henkow was born in a small village on the Eastern shores of the Dnepr river, near Orekhov. He told me that the area between Orekhov and Zaporoshye was settled by many ethnic Germans, which originally lived on the Volga river, some 300 miles farther east. His father was one of these ethnic Germans and that's why he knew a little German.

Chief Henkow explained: "In the early 1930s, the Soviets built more and more industrial complexes and weapon factories along the shores of the Volga. Many

ethnic Germans, who were accused of being bourgeois, were re-settled to form agricultural cooperatives on the eastern shores of the Dnepr." In fact, Henkow's uncle was the minister of the Lutheran church in one of these settlements. He was arrested and wound up in a Siberian labor camp, as did many other priests. After the minister's arrest his son, Hans Henkel (the police chief's cousin), secretly carried on the Lutheran ministry in Orekhov, a village that the ethnic Germans called Orkenhof.

Coming back to my quarters, after this evening with chief Henkow, I realized that I had discovered some very important facts. I started to speculate about how Heinz and I could use these coincidences to establish a creditable ancestry. A check of the maps at MGHQ revealed that the settlements of these ethnic Germans were only about thirty miles east of the city of Zaporoshye, which was to be our next stop.

In the last week of September Heinz was released from the hospital and joined me in Talnoye. He had lost some weight, but otherwise was fully recovered.

Heinz and I came up with the plan to ask Schröder to permit me to travel to Zaporoshye and Orekhov, to find relatives. We told him that the local police chief's cousin was a Lutheran minister and would help me in my search.

Governing Counsel, as was his habit, thought for a little while and then said: "Our troops have just taken Zaporoshye and are securing the area. You are right on time. I'll issue marching orders to you to assure the cooperation and support of the military police. You are to leave tomorrow (September 27) and rejoin us in Zaporoshye on October 6, which is the date that MGHQ will arrive there." He smiled and added: "Don't you dare to come back without acceptable documents!"

Before leaving I checked the conditions of this segment of the Eastern Front by asking the mapping department at MGHQ. The situation was described in the following manner: "General Guderian of the German tank

battalion, in one of his famous pincer movements, had crossed the Dnepr on July 10. He had reached the northern Ukrainian key city Smolensk by July 16. Taking more than 200,000 Russian soldiers as prisoners of war (PW), he came within 200 miles of Moscow. In the southern part of the Ukraine, Field Marshal Gerd von Rumsted, to who's army MGHQ belonged, had reached the Dnepr in August and took 600,000 Russian PW. Zaporoshye had been occupied September 25."

Equipped with maps, marching orders, and a letter from Henkow, I started the trip to Zaporoshye. The residential address of minister Henkel, as given to me by chief Henkow, turned out to be incorrect. By chance, the military policeman that had driven me there thought he has heard of a civilian translator, who was a priest, and worked for a German outfit. It turned out that this was the man I was looking for.

Minister Hans Henkel was lean, of average height, about 40 year old, and had a very engaging smile. His Russian passport said:

"Hanyer Henkow"

" Nationality - Ukrainian"

"Occupation - Tractor-Driver".

His wife was a buxom lady school teacher. He had a daughter and a son, ages eight and five. The Henkels lived in a very small apartment in back of the building where Masha Henkow/Henkel taught grade-school.

From the very beginning of our relationship it was evident that Hans Henkel had resolved to get onto the German bandwagon. Hans was a curious mixture of a blatant opportunist and a real decent human being, trying to do the Christian thing.

He read the letter from his uncle, the Talnoye's chief of police. It was written in Russian and requested that he help me, any way he could, to document my ancestry. I told Hans that I believed that both my father and mother were born near Zaporoshye, from Volga-German stock. They had left the area, taking my

brother and me along, when I was still a baby. Neither my brother nor I had clear recollections since we had lived since then in so many different places. Our Father and mother are not alive any more and all our documents were lost through an act of war. He, Hans Henkel, having inherited his fathers ministry, is my only hope of establishing my heritage.

Off course these were not my exact words (I could not possibly remember them), but in essence that's what I told him. Henkel was immediately prepared to drop everything he was doing (I do not know what that actually was) and to go ahead helping me. He never asked for payment of any kind. Also, he never suggested that he found my story or my requests odd, in any way. On the contrary, Henkel said: "This is such a sad story. It is typical, of the unfair treatment of ethnic Germans under the Soviet regime. We all hope that this will change now that the victorious German forces have liberated us."

We were eating some *borsht* (cabbage soup) and black bread for supper, supplemented by black-market bacon that I had brought along. Then Henkel said: "Walter is such a common family name in our ethnic community. We must be careful to find the right family. So many people moved away, just about the time your family took off. We'll have to travel to Orkenhof (Orekhov), where I have stored my fathers church books, to look into the records." All this was sweet music to my ears.

Next morning, just after the sun came up, Henkel got on his bicycle to drive to a 'Friend' (all Lutherans called each other 'Friends') to borrow a *byedka*. This turned out to be a two-wheeled horse-drawn carriage. In the meantime, I cut a Travel Permit (surplus from Tarnopol) for Minister Hans Henkel.

We set out sitting on the spring-loaded seat between the two large wheels of this uniquely Russian vehicle. It looked to me like a highbred of the light vehicles, that are used for trotters at the racetrack.

First we had to cross the Dnepr. Fortunately the retreating Russians had not managed to dynamite the dam. German military police and uniformed Ukrainian militia guarded the crossing. My Travel Orders from MGHQ and Henkel's Travel Permit worked fine. We were warned about pockets of Red Army stragglers. While most were just looking to surrender to someone, some might feel like fighting. I checked the large-caliber hand gun, which had been issued to me when I left Talnoye. I had never shot any kind of gun and wondered how effective I could be, defending us against Red Army soldiers.

Henkel decided to take the country road to Orekhov. This dirt road wound its way through several small villages. The more direct route would have been via the paved highway, but Henkel wanted to visit the villages too. The first one was just about one hour brisk drive from the Dnepr's shore. It consisted of a handful of thatched houses and a large cooperative, that looked like a run-down one-story factory building. Except for some chickens and geese the village appeared to be totally deserted. A dog was barking in the distance and I heard the moo-ing of cows in some barn. It was a most peaceful scene.

"I bet you are the first German soldier this village has seen," said Henkel. "These poor people have heard all the government propaganda about the plundering and raping German barbarians. They are hiding to see what will happen." He stopped our vehicle near a well and watered the horse. Next he walked to the cooperative's office. I followed him into the building.

A woman of about 35 stood near a desk. She kept looking at us. She wore the typical farmer's long skirt, knitted wool-sweater over an embroidered blouse, kerchief on her head, and leather boots up to her knees. She looked just about the same as I remembered the farmer's wives that sold produce in the markets of Lwów. Henkel knew her and addressed her by her first name. He spoke German to her but she answered hesitantly in Russian.

Tanja, it turned out, was the secretary of the cooperative. Besides her family, that consisted of her parents and several siblings, only a few other families had remained in the village.

Now there were less than fifty people in the village that used to have close to two-hundred inhabitants. All men over age 13 and under age 50 had been mobilized weeks ago. Then, many young women had been drafted into work battalions to dig tank traps around Kiev and Leningrad. "The Red Army retreated three days ago and some of our girls went along," said Tanja. We were now sitting in the cooperative's dining room surrounded by about one dozen women and youngsters, that had appeared out of nowhere.

Henkel explained our mission to some of the elders, who treated him very respectfully. I had trouble following the conversation. These ethnic Germans, when talking to each other, fell into a dialect that (as I learned later) originated in the 16th century in Germany's Black Forest. They discussed various Walter families that lived now, or had once lived in the surrounding villages. Henkel kept notes on a paper that he had inserted into his bible. We were offered food, and given oats for the horse. After a few hours we were back on the road to the next village.

I don't remember how many villages we visited that day and on the following day. Substantially the same scenario was repeated in each village. In one of these villages we found an old woman who was a member of one of the Walter families. She was over ninety years old and dictated to Henkel an endless list of people that used to be members of her tribe. As we approached the county seat Orekhov, we saw more and more war-inflicted destructions of houses and barns.

The Lutheran Church of Orkenhof

Mid-mornings of the third day of our trip we arrived in Orekhov. It was a city of about twenty-six thousand inhabitants. In its days of glory, about half of the population were of ethnic German decent. That was about ten years ago, before the Soviets had started to disperse the German ethnics.

In the town was a large tractor depot and service facility, several flour mills, four silos, and other agricultural installations. Two of the silos had been used as machine gun platforms by the Red Army and had been blown up during the fighting. Many houses showed damage from artillery fire. There was a small German Army field hospital in one of the schools.

We checked-in at the German military police post. It consisted of three military police men. Then we proceeded to a large building, near the town's center. Henkel explained that it was the old Lutheran church that had been converted to a warehouse by the Soviets.

As we got nearer Henkel got very excited and upset. From a distance we could see that the building had been shelled and there must have been a fire. Only about half of the building was still standing. Even this half was badly charred and parts of it were still smoldering. A few people stood in front of the building. Two young women wore fire fighter's uniforms.

Henkel talked to the uniformed women. He identified himself as the minister and told them that the church's records were hidden in a steel box in the basement. He said that he must rescue the box. He pointed to me: "He is a member of the Military Government Headquarters in Zaporoshye. He needs these records." After many discussions a group of people started to clear a path through the smoldering mess. After some time they retrieved a metal box of about three cubic feet size.

The metal box had been laying in water for several days. Henkel opened it. The contents were soaking wet. The metal box contained several big record books, a few old bibles, and hymn books. Henkel was totally broken up. The ink of the handwritten records had started running together and the pages were starting to stick to each other.

We brought the box and it's contents to the house of a 'Friend'. Henkel held an impromptu service in the court yard of a residential building. The service was in German and Russian. It was beautifully done and brought tears to the eyes of most participants.

After the service the congregation helped with carefully taking the record books apart and hanging the individual pages on wash lines to dry. I could see the damage was very intense. Most of the entries were unreadable. Henkel hoped and prayed that the entries would become clearer once the pages dried.

We stayed another day, waiting for the books to dry. In the meantime Henkel asked me to write down all I knew about the names, dates, birthplaces, etc., of myself, my brother, my parents, and my grandparents. He said he would compare this to his notes and to whatever he could gather from the church records. Finally he would use all the data to draw genealogical charts and birth certificates for me and for my brother.

Before we left, the next day, he gave me two birth certificates and two genealogical charts, one for me and the other for Heinz. The documents were written in his precise hand, on the letterhead of the Lutheran Church of Orkenhof, Ukraine. He had copied my list and had added Orkenhof as our birth place, and Chirskaya on the Volga, as the birth places of our parents and grandparents. All persons were Lutheran-Protestants. We stopped at the military police post and Henkel's oath was taken and his signature was verified on the documents.

5.

Zaporoshye, Ukraine

Named Alexandrovsk before the communist revolution, this attractive town on the left bank of the Dnepr river had a population of 290,000 before its occupation by the Germans in September 1941. By the time the German troops had "secured" the District, the population had shrunk to just below 200,000, since many had left with the Red Army. Zaporoshye means "beyond the rapids" and it is situated south of the falls on which the Dnepropetrovsk hydraulic station was constructed. There were also large factories that produced agricultural machinery and the town was a railway junction with extensive repair facilities.

Zaporoshye is located opposite the Khortitsa Island. This island is known as the home of the Zaporoshian Cossacks and Kurgans. These Carpathian tribes were fanatical anti-communist and cooperated with the Germans, hoping for Ukrainian independence. In addition there were many ethnic Germans in the District.

Just before the German occupation 37,000 Jews lived in the District. About 18,000 Jews fled with the Red Army. By 1943, when the Red Army re-took the District all remaining Jews had been liquidated.

Totally occupied with the local war, on the Eastern Front nobody paid much attention to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, on December 7, and U.S.A.'s declaration of war on Japan. By April 1942 the German paper, that was available to the occupation forces, mentioned that the U.S.A. had entered the war against Germany and Italy. The Nazi press described America as a decadent nation incapable of fighting a war. At the

time of the victorious German offenses, most Germans believed their armed forces to be unbeatable. They paid no attention to the "Jew-dominated decadent Americans."

MGHQ was quartered in a complex of buildings that had been the residences of the local aristocracy before the revolution. Later they served as communist party administration buildings. Some of the rooms were very attractive with some leaded glass windows still intact.

There were beautiful baroque fireplaces, and some pieces of eighteenth-century furniture. Also some impressive oil paintings were hanging on the walls. Many empty picture frames were standing around on the floors. Someone had stolen the best paintings by cutting the canvases and removing them from the frames.

Occupation troops do not respect personal or property rights of their victims. Later in the year, it got bitterly cold. There was not sufficient fuel (coal or firewood) available. We saw soldiers breaking up much of the antique furniture and burning it in the fireplaces.

Heinz and I were assigned to a room adjacent to Schröder's large office/conference room. Our office was narrow and long. Besides two desks, some file cabinets and a table, it was long enough to accommodate two cots, with a narrow isle between them. We slept in the office, behind a screen. We felt more comfortable by ourselves, rather than in the soldier's quarters. We worked and lived in this room for the following eleven months.

Following Schröder's example, we worked often twelve and fourteen hour days. There was a never ending amount of work. It mostly consisted of translating and following through on ordinances and regulations issued by him. We never imagined the complexities of administering a large city and District, in an occupied territory.

Three power centers performed the administration. Each was engaged in its own power play.

1. The Agricultural Administration: Mainly interested in squeezing the maximum amount of food out, for the troops or to ship to Germany.
2. The SS-headquarters: Included the feared Secret Police (GESTAPO), responsible for the Jewish "final solution" and for finding perpetrators of acts against the Reich.
3. The Military Government Headquarters (MGHQ): Responsible for the civilian government and the Military Justice System.

Each of these agencies were responsible to a different arm of the German government. Each had a different secret agenda. There was much interference, finger pointing, and at times, bad blood.

The workload of the various MGHQ departments required the hiring of civilian employees. It started with manual laborers, kitchen help, and maintenance personnel. Later translators, file clerks, and others were added. All civilian employees were young women.

The influx of these civilians changed the make-up of MGHQ. It took on the mannerism of a civilian government with shorter working hours and more bureaucratic aspects. Many Germans fraternized with the female employees. It started with the cooks and housekeeping staffs. These noncommissioned officers hired kitchen helpers and cleaning women who quite openly did "double duty."

Soon the sergeants in the military court system and in the military administration also hired attractive female helpers. Usually these women came in just before lunch, which was the main meal of the day. They then stayed until all hours.

Some of the ethnic Germans were quite knowledgeable and proficient in translating from German into Ukrainian. None were able to do a good job translating from Ukrainian or Russian into German. This was exclusively our domain and Heinz and I never felt threatened by the local competition.

The main part of the pay for local civilians was the food they received. It was very valuable, since the civilian population suffered a very severe food shortage. The civilians also received a salary. It was paid in Rubbles, the local currency. Rubbles were of no use. There was nothing that Rubbles would buy.

Heinz and I received our salary in German Marks. We used some small part of this salary to buy cigarettes (pipe tobacco for Heinz) and necessities such as soap, razor blades, and toothpaste from the paymaster's convenience store. We deposited what was left of our salary, which was most of it, into an account with the paymaster for save-keeping.

Crimes Against the Population

We quickly learned to forget old clichés such as "policemen uphold the laws" and "government bureaucrats are incorruptible." We saw daily proof that these clichés were invalid in the German occupied territories.

Unlike the fighting troops at the front, the German occupation troops had lots of time on their hands. This gave them ample opportunity for criminal acts against the population. They benefited by the unwritten German law, which designated all non-Germans as sub-humans. It gave the victorious Germans unlimited conqueror's rights. The only reason to temper the crime wave was the German's dependence on the population's services and the existence of partisans.

The partisans were freedom fighters. They hid in the woods. Occasionally partisans dynamited bridges and railroad tracks. Whenever German crimes against the population mounted, the population increased their support of the partisans. Administrators, such as Governing Counsel Schröder, our boss, had to do a balancing act between the perceived "conqueror's right" of the German troops and the necessary "appeasement" of the occupied country's population.

My knowledge of crimes came from translating reports that came to Schröder, through official channels, from the militia chiefs he supervised. Individual crimes, committed by officers were referred to the court martial.

Typical for the settling of individual crime investigations was the case of the stolen icon. It started with the report by the militia chief of a village in the District. The chief, a feisty middle-aged woman, reported a theft. A German officer, rooming at a Ukrainian family, was accused of stealing a valuable, antique icon from their bedroom wall. The officer denied it.

Military police Sergeant Kraus was assigned to investigate. He asked me to come along as the interpreter. Kraus, a second military policeman, and I arrived at the scene of the alleged crime. A youngish Ukrainian woman opened the door. She told Sergeant Kraus: "I saw the officer taking the icon off the wall. He took it and walked out the door with it. He never came back with the icon."

Kraus asked the woman to show him the wall where the icon had hung. She walked ahead of him into the bedroom. He closed the door after he went in. We heard a commotion and muffled screams. I opened the door and saw Kraus raping the woman on the bed. I closed the door and waited. Kraus soon came out of the bedroom. "There never was an icon" he said, "case closed."

The Final Solution For Jews

The liquidation of Jews was a different matter. The SS-Troop Commando that orchestrated these crimes was a small outfit. There were no more than about a dozen men that wore the hated black SS-uniforms. Since they used the local militia to carry out the liquidation, Schröder was to be informed of all actions. I assumed that he had some say in it. At least I know that he, Schröder, assumed so.

For their "actions" the SS commandeered trucks and militarized volkswagens from MGHQ and other outfits. The snazzy SS-Lieutenant, that headed the commando, walked in on Schröder, whenever he felt like it. He did not observe the customary military courtesies to which a general staff officer of Schröder's rank was entitled. Most conversations between these two officers quickly turned into shouting matches.

Two incidents stand out in my memory. One day in August of 1942 the militia chief of Tomakovka stormed into Schröder's office. He was a sturdy Cossack and known for his great admiration of everything German. Tomakovka was a town of about 50,000, half of which were Cossacks. Tomakovka also was a railroad switching center of great importance to the German supply lines.

According to the chief, a truck manned by two SS-troupers and by some of his commandeered men visited each Jewish residence in Tomakowka. They took all children under two years of age, right from their mothers arms and killed the infants right in front of their families, by bashing-in their heads. They then threw the little corpses into the truck. In the evening they had emptied the truck into the Dnepr.

The following night the railroad switching yard went up in flames. It was still burning, while the chief was in Schröder's office, complaining about this inhumanity.

The other incident happened a few days later. The Lieutenant of MGHQ's military police detachment reported to Schröder: "For the past several weeks the SS had systematically picked up Jewish families from their residences. They brought them to one of the schools in Zaporoshye that had been turned into a temporary holding facility. These families were to be shipped to Poland into resettlement work camps."

Instead, the SS-troop, helped by local hoodlums, marched the Jews into the Woods. The Jews, mostly women and children, were almost naked. The hoodlums took their clothes as payment for helping the SS-troop. In the woods the SS made the Jews dig large mass graves.

The SS machine-gunned groups of one hundred and more Jews at a time. Many were still moving, after they fell into the graves. Earth moving equipment was standing by and covered the mass graves immediately.

Knowing about these atrocities, and being unable to do anything about them, drove Heinz and me to the edge of insanity. The only thing that held us together was the paralyzing fear of showing an emotion, that might give our secret away. We had no doubt that our lot would be a terrible one, if found out to be Jews masquerading as ethnic Germans.

After every one of these incidents Schröder had his customary shouting match with the SS-Lieutenant. He followed it up by complaining to the commanding general Brigadier General von Hessenick. He was probably told to look the other way. Roughly one month later Schröder was retired from MGHQ and recalled to Germany. I am convinced that this was the consequence of Schröder's complaints about these and other incidents.

A Letter From The Parents

Toward the end of August we received an ominous letter from our parents. I was the last communication

that we were ever to receive from them. We had kept writing them regularly, about every two weeks. We figured that hearing from us would give them comfort.

Earlier in the year we noted that they had been forced to leave their apartment and had been moved into a small room in the Jewish ghetto. We kept sending them letters and I some time also enclosed a letter for my girlfriend Ruth. Our parents answered by sending cryptic notes to us, using our field postal number as an address. For safety's sake they always addressed us as "Old Room-Mates."

This last letter, dated August 17, 1942, is reproduced and translated on the following pages. Mother uses 'belly' as a code for father and 'ball' for herself. We had kidded them, while still in Vienna, about gaining so much weight, to make father seem as if he was all belly and mother round as a ball.

The letter told us that mother was almost nabbed (by the Nazis) three times. She was persuading father to try to flee to Hungary. We had heard of murderous gangsters that promised desperate Jews a possibility to cross the border into Hungary or Rumania. It was believed, that there the persecution was less severe. The story is, that the victims were often told to travel lightly: "Just bring your valuables, gold and jewelry." Once they got near the border they were killed for their valuables. We were sure that our parents were familiar with these stories. What choice did they have? Father was 50 years old, mother 46. I hope their death was swift and without torture.

Our Parents Last Letter

17. III. 42

Liebe alte immer nachbarn!

Eueren langen, ausführlichen Brief vom 26. Juli sowie Karte o. S. S. mit Freuden erhalten. Es freut uns zu hören dass Ihr so einen ausgedehnten Wartenkreis habt. Ihr seid dabei viel und nützt den Vorgesetzten. Hoffentlich wird auch eure Beförderung bald bewilligt werden. Bert und ich sind auf der Post jetzt und sind mit all unseren Gedanken bei Euch und den Kindern. Denn zu Hause ist kein Platz um in gestört schreiben zu können. Von Kurt lange nichts gehört. Denkt Euch. Paul hat der sportlichen Einfall gehabt uns ein photo-

graphie damit Ihr im ev. Falle ein Foto habt. Das Billardspiel ist jetzt nicht mehr unterhaltsam, denn Kunts Kugel wäre fast dreimal fortgerollt und erst alle Kugeln haben sich gel, li ihres aus. Ruff hat alles nach bis jetzt. Die Briefe haben wir bis jetzt nicht weiter gegeben. Schreibt ruhig weiter wie ich mer. Vielleicht schreiben wir diese Woche, wenn es geht noch einmal. Denkt immer, dass ich Euch stets lieb und aufrichtig geschildert habe.

Juliana

2. Bertold
jung! Wie voll es jetzt hier genügend Wohnungen gibt (50.000) Menschen untergebracht, will Kugel

Hier grüßen Mutter zuehen, Ich
ist lange vor ich machen soll.

Seit alle heubild von mir

gehört den Bräuer.

Hier gefallen Euch die Bilder?

Die Energie ist nicht nur auf

den Bräuer.

17. August '42

Dear Old Room-Mates!

With pleasure we received your long and explicit letter of 26 July and post card of 8. August. We are happy to hear about your extensive responsibilities. You learn a lot and you are useful to your supervisors. Hoping you promotions will be granted soon. Bert and I are sitting in the post office, since there is no room for undisturbed writing at home, and our thoughts are with you and Kurt. We have not heard from Kurt for a long time. Belly had the spontaneous idea to have our photos taken, so you have our pictures for all eventualities. The billiard game is not entertaining any more. Kurt's ball almost rolled off three times, and generally all balls miss the goal, including li.(?) Ruth so far has everything. We have not delivered the letters yet. You can keep writing, as always. Maybe we will write again this week, if possible. Remember forever, that I always loved and appreciated you!

Julianna

2 pictures

Guys! Notwithstanding that there are now sufficient apartments available (50,000 people have been re-settled), Ball wants to move to her mother. I'm thinking about it. With warmest regards,

your Belly

How do you like the pictures? The energy is not only in the pictures.

6.

Berlin, Germany

In September Schröder told us that he will retire from his post at MGHQ and will return home by the end of the month. He directed Sergeant Glupke, the court clerk, to obtain all forms and affidavits that we would need to apply for German citizenship. Schröder explained that to be enlisted into the German Armed Forces, we first had to become German citizens. During wartime, he explained, normally no applications for naturalization are processed. Through his connections in Berlin, he had arranged that an exception will be made.

"You are loners," Schröder said, "you do not get along with the soldiers. Many of the non-commissioned officers and some of the officers do not like the special status in MGHQ, that I've given you. I can't leave you here. Without my protection they would soon eat you alive."

Schröder also told us that the son of one of his friends is the commanding officer of a newly formed propaganda (psychological warfare) company. This Captain Reinhard Richtenhold will requisition us to Potsdam, near Berlin. A few weeks later, when Richtenhold moves out with his company to the Eastern Front, we will be a part of his outfit. This was the longest statement that Schröder ever made to us. Usually, after some hesitation, he communicated with us in short, single sentences.

Sergeant Glupke produced bundles of documents for us to sign. He also showed us several recommendations from various general staff officers. Glupke told us, that the recommendations and the applications will be forwarded to the courts in Berlin.

Schröder arranged for us to meet with him around October 30 in Weimar. He decided we should stay there a few days before we travel to Berlin and "Onward to new duties."

Good-by Minister Henkel

Before leaving Zaporoshye I had to say good-bye to minister Hans Henkel in Orekhov. I had no trouble finding Hans. He lived with his family not far from the Lutheran Protestant Church of Orkenhof. With the help of his parishioners he had reconstructed the church. No damage from the fire was visible. However, Hans was not entirely happy.

After rebuilding the church, the German Agricultural Administration had promptly requisitioned it as a warehouse, which it was before the fire. Hans was holding services in the church, but his parishioners were sitting on sacks of grain instead of church pews and the altar was a stack of crates.

Hans was also sad and disillusioned. The Germans had arrested and probably killed his old friend, the rabbi of a Jewish temple. His friend had secretly held services, just like Hans had done for the Lutherans, during the times of Soviet's religious persecutions. "A man of the cloth," Hans kept saying, "they did not have to do that!"

He asked me about the rumors that the German war effort was not going as well as the news media made believe. By that time the German forces were about 200 miles beyond Rostov. They had taken Rostov on August 9. Now they were driving towards the oil fields in the Caucasus and along the Volga. The primary goal was to take Stalingrad.

The German campaign was more than 7 month later than planned and publicly announced. It was rumored

that the turning point of the German advances was near. The battle of Stalingrad had been raging for weeks. The Germans were loosing manpower and equipment at a rate that left no doubt about the outcome of this battle. They were badly beaten a few days later, on October 14, at Stalingrad. This signaled the beginning of the Russian victories, and start of the German retreat.

I considered Hans my friend, the only real friend I had at that time, besides my brother Heinz. I told him what I honestly felt. "The Germans can't win this war. You owe it to yourself and to your family to get out of the Ukraine as soon as Germany starts folding. The last chance to get out alive, would be to start running west, as soon as you hear that Kharkov, Byelograd or Kiev are retaken by the Soviets."

As it turned out, he had almost a year until this happened, on August 5, 1943. I've never seen Hans again, after this meeting in Orekhov, in October 1942. I hope that he was successful in preserving his live, and the lives of his family.

Weimar, Germany

During the war years Germany imported more than three million foreign workers from the occupied territories. These workers, mostly women between the ages of 15 and 25, were promised good food, good wages, and an education. Most of them volunteered their services. Once they were signed-on it was very difficult for them to return home. Practically all stayed until the end of the war.

To travel to Germany, Schröder had arranged for us to serve as escorts for a trainload of foreign workers. Our escort duties were simple. The train consisted of thirty six freight cars and one passenger car. Each freight car contained roughly 40 women. This left sufficient room for the women to lay down on the car's floor. Including Heinz and me there were thirty

six escorts, occupying the passenger car at the train's end. The escorts were responsible for the distribution of the meager food rations, and to keep order. The train ride was uneventful.

Heinz and I left MGHQ around October 20. It took about 6 days to reach Poznan, near the German border, where we left the transport. We continued the remaining roughly 500 miles to Weimar using regular passenger trains. We had Schröder's home phone number and called him from the station, after we arrived in Weimar. He told us to wait, he was coming for us.

We expected him to come in civilian clothes and speculated what he will look like, without uniform and medals. After what seemed a long time, a military vehicle pulled up at the station. Schröder was in uniform and a soldier was driving the car. "I'm taking you to the Hindenburg barracks to get you decently outfitted for your appointments in Berlin," he said. We had expected to be taken to his home. We had hoped to meet Mrs. Schröder, whose picture we had seen on his desk. We would have enjoyed to meet his son and daughter.

At the large military compound, the Hindenburg barracks, Schröder brought us to the office of a supply Sergeant. He told him, that we are the men, that he had talked about with the commanding general. The Sergeant said: "Yes sir, I have been given my orders. We'll take care of these men." Schröder looked at us and said: "That seems to be it. Good luck to you." With a mocking smile on his face he raised his hand in the Nazi salute and said "Heil Hitler!" In turn we raised our hands and clicked our heels "Heil Hitler, Herr Governing Counsel." Schröder turned on his heels and walked out of our lives. We never saw or heard of him again.

We stayed at the Hindenburg barracks several days. There were dentist and doctor's appointments. I got an eye examination and new eyeglasses. Each of us received a complete outfit of new uniforms, including winter coats, infantry boots, underwear, sweaters, etc. The uniforms were of pre-war quality, normally not available

anymore. We showered several times each day and got short "aryan haircuts." When we finally left for Berlin we felt like civilized human beings again (in spite of the uniforms), for the first time since before we left Lwów, 29 month ago.

The office for naturalization was on the third floor of a large building on Ernst Reuter Platz, near the Technical University of Berlin. The lower floors of this governmental building were occupied by the Institute for Racial Studies and the Aryan Institute. Heinz and I were standing in front of this building with a clammy feeling in our stomachs.

We had arrived in Berlin in the evening. During the 200 miles long ride from Weimar to Berlin we had reviewed our situation. We were well dressed in brand new German infantry uniforms. We had a large sum of German money with us. Each had more than a year's NC salary in his pocket. Also, most importantly, we had all the necessary documents to become citizens of the German Reich.

Sergeant Glupke had been very thorough. He had even arranged for a rented room with a family in Berlin. We were registered there with the police. This was important, since one needs an address in Germany, to apply for naturalization. When we arrived at this prearranged room, we found food ration-cards (stamps) waiting for us. Oh, to what extent German organization and follow-through can go!

Institute for Racial Studies

Before submitting the application, which was so complete in every respect, that it's approval was guaranteed, there was one last, but very important hurdle to overcome. We had to submit to an examination at the Institute for Racial Studies. This was to determine to which of the different Aryan tribes we belong. We were told that this scientific determination

is made by taking measurements of the bone structure, especially of the skull. In addition, the color of the skin, hair and eyes are features, that are considered. If in doubt, X-rays are taken, to examine the shape and curvature of the spinal column.

"All this hocus-pocus cannot be taken seriously" we had said, back in Zaporoshye, to the military policeman from Berlin, who had told us about the Institute. "It's a science," he said, "and it's very accurate. Many professors are at the institute, how could they all be wrong?"

Business was very slow at the Institute that day. There were several attractive young ladies in white lab-coats yawning and drinking ersatz-coffee. We were given hospital coats, the kind that doesn't quite close in back. Heinz went into one waiting room, I into another. A young "scientist" spent almost one hour taking measurements of my head. He used all kinds of complex looking instruments and dictated numbers to a female lab-coat. Next, another "scientist" measured my legs, feet, arms and hands. Several photos were taken. I was told to get dressed and have lunch in the canteen ("You brought your ration card?"). Heinz was already there. Had we told them that we are brothers, so we could not stem from different tribes? Let's keep our fingers crossed.

By late afternoon we started to get restless. The doors were not locked and it went through our heads, that we could just walk out and disappear. "Where would we hide?" Our thoughts were interrupted by yet another young lady in a lab-coat. "Walter brothers," she said, "please step in here to see professor Know-it-All." We were told that it was scientifically determined, that we belong to Aryan Group 36T2East (or some other ridiculous number, like this one). "This is a very common, but very desirable group of Aryans. Congratulations!" A certificate was presented. We were to give it to the naturalization court officer the next day.

During the night, following this memorable day, Allied bombers strafed Berlin in several separate

attacks, as they did almost every night. Heinz and I were sitting in the public bomb shelter, praying: "Allied bombers please, please not the Institute for Racial Research, they are doing such good work!"

Next day we had to go through some formalities, but by the end of the day we were handed our naturalization papers, making us citizens of the German Reich. With the papers came a mobilization notice, directing us to register within five days at the Armed Forces Reserves Center in Potsdam, near Berlin.

Propaganda Company

In Germany and its occupied territories it was general knowledge by now, that the German victories had started to turn sour. The defeat at Stalingrad was a decisive one and very costly in German manpower and morale. All over the northern part of the Russian front German troops started to retreat to avoid being encircled. The Russian generals had learned their lessons in pincer movements from the Germans. The Soviets began the re-conquest of the Ukraine.

In the Ukrainian territories, occupied by the Germans, some partisan activity had always existed. These freedom fighters, unlike the ones in the western occupied territories (France, Norway, Denmark and The Netherlands), were organized into regular battalions and were hiding in vast wooded areas. We learned later that some of these partisan units contained many young Jewish men and women.

The partisans were first not supported by the general population. This changed as soon as it became evident that Germany may not be victorious. With the population on their side, the partisan's attacks became much more effective and the Germans found it more difficult to defend themselves against this enemy in their back.

The German High Command realized, very late in the game, that the support of the occupied population was important. Also, that the morale of the German occupation troops had to be boosted. To accomplish these two goals, propaganda companies were created. They staffed these units of psychological warfare with opinion formers such as writers, poets, actors, and advertising agency executives.

A new propaganda company was being formed by the reserves center in Potsdam. This company was under the command of Captain Reinhard Richtenhof, the son of Governing Counselor Schröder's friend.

Potsdam is a neat little town on the river Havel, about 16 miles S.W. of Berlin. It was connected with Berlin by an electric light rail, and by steamboat service through the chain of lakes formed by the river. It is famous for having been one of the residences of the German emperor and for its many elaborate historic buildings. Many of these buildings stem from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In 1942/43 the population of Potsdam was around 100,000. Potsdam was mostly spared by the Allied air attacks and there was not much destruction visible.

It was the same Potsdam that housed three years later, July 17 to August 2, 1945, the last Allied conference of World War II, which was appropriately code-named Terminal. It was attended by U.S. president Harry S. Truman, the new British prime minister Clement Attlee, and Stalin. The war with Germany had ended in May 1945, but the war in Asia went on. It is said that during these discussions Truman notified Stalin that the U.S. had successfully tested an atomic bomb and was shortly to employ it against Japan. Other important agenda points were the division of Germany, and Russia's right to exact reparation payments from its zone of occupation that included Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Rumania and eastern Austria.

Not many agreements were reached and it is reported that Truman wrote in a letter to his mother: "You never saw such pig-headed people as are the

Russians. I hope I never have to hold another conference with them - but of course I will." (Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, New York Times Inc., 1955.)

Heinz and I stayed in Potsdam for about six weeks. We met with the other members of the propaganda company. There were about 30 Lieutenants and Sergeants and 20 or so support personal. We also met several times with the CO Captain Richtenhof. He was friendly and treated us the same as everyone else. He told us that our first assignment would be in Odessa, on the Black Sea, in the southern Ukraine.

In Odessa he was going to split his company into two parts. One of us to remain in Odessa, the other to be stationed in Sevastopol, on the southern tip of the Crimean peninsula. Heinz was assigned to Sevastopol. I was to stay in Odessa. This came as a shock to us. We realized that we'll be separated by a distance of over 300 miles!

7.

Odessa, Ukraine

After many delays the propaganda company started on the more than 1,800 miles trip from Potsdam, Germany to Odessa, Ukraine. To the former border between Poland and Russia we traveled by rail, with the men and material loaded unto freight cars. Once we reached the border the trek continued in large military trucks. We traveled along the crowded highways, often blocked by snow drifts, some times several feet high.

It was bitterly cold, this beginning of February 1943. On the average we traveled not more than 150 miles per day. Whenever possible we spent nights in rooms, requisitioned from farmers. For the men it was the perfect opportunity to get acquainted and to form friendships, while spending their time in conversations, playing cards, and such.

Heinz and I had dropped our stilted way of speaking German as soon as we got away from the Military Government Headquarters. We left our "eastern" accent in Zaporoshye and we assumed a more normal way of speaking German. We had gotten used to using clean, unaccented speech, which we still use today, when speaking German. Unless we fall back into Viennese, which now takes some effort, no one has been able to tell, from the way we talk, where we have grown up.

Naturally we could never afford to drop our guard. Even though we finally had good and valid papers, we were still deathly afraid of being discovered. This prevented us from becoming friends with any one of the interesting persons that were a part of this outfit. We kept to ourselves, stayed away from the poker parties and did not socialize. When groups of men invited us to come along "to have a good time with the local farm girls," we found reasons to decline. We trusted no one.

I cannot speak for Heinz, but I know that the psychological scars of that time have never healed. Even now, so many years later, I still have difficulties to trust anyone and to make friends. As a consequence I look back at a lonesome life.

The hours of idleness, while traveling, had other serious drawbacks. We had now time to reflect on what had happened not only to us, but to all the people we loved and treasured. I had a terribly severe longing for my parents. I knew that they probably were dead. This did not make me miss them any less. I also mourned all the other friends that stayed behind in Lwów and, I imagined, had been slaughtered by then.

Nights were particularly bad. Nightmares not only included relatives and friends, but experiences in the ghettos of Tarnopol, Tomakovka and Zaporoshye. Our fear of crying out during these reoccurring nightmares were the reason we always tried to sleep by ourselves, away from general quarters.

By the first week of March 1943 we reached Vinnitsa, in the southern Ukraine, about 300 miles north-east of Odessa. There was snow on the streets. We were getting ready to occupy quarters in requisitioned private homes. As soldiers often did, we relieved our kidneys by carving our initials into the snow, with our urine. Mine came out dark red and it looked as if I was passing blood. Heinz, and some other soldiers from our outfit, thought I'd better walk over to the field hospital and have them check this.

Kneipp In Bad Kreutznach, Germany

The diagnosis was a severe case of jaundice and other kidney dysfunctions and nervous disorders. The stress of the past thirty month was taking it's toll. Heinz had to continue to his destination alone. I was put onto a hospital train and started moving back to Germany. My destination was a Kneipp treatment center

in Bad Kreutznach, near Mainz, in the beautiful Pfalz. I must have been in bad shape. I have absolutely no recollection of the trip, which must have taken several days.

Father Kneipp, a Catholic monk, lived in the past century. He founded a healing method that uses herbs, water massages and exercises. This is used in conjunction with conventional medical methods and achieves excellent results with non-surgical patients. There are several Kneipp treatment centers in Europe. All are staffed by monks and mail nurses. They are strictly vegetarian and insist on a rather severe discipline for their patients. This includes:

1. Getting up with the sun and going to sleep when it sets.
2. Morning-, midday-, and evening prayers.
3. Sessions with the monk-advisor (psychiatrist), every second day.
4. Clean living (whatever that means).

After I was healed of jaundice, several problems remained. The main ones were: Not being able to digest food, sleeplessness, migraine, and occasional asthma attacks. These are the typical problems treated in Kneipp treatment centers. The herbal treatment was not at all what I had expected. Herbs were not given as medicines to take internally. The treatment consisted of packing the patient into a sack filled with carefully selected herbs. Sometimes the herbs were wetted with warm water, and other times they were just left dry.

Within minutes the strong, but never unpleasant odor of the herbs put the patient into a deep sleep. The patient's sleep was carefully timed by an attendant. After the prescribed time, the sleep was interrupted and the patient was taken to the water treatment room. There a stream of cool water, from what looked like a fire hose, was played over the patient, vigorously massaging his body. After several weeks of this

treatment my appetite returned, the headaches disappeared and I was ready for strenuous physical exercises. The exercise was done under the supervision of a sadistic monk ("If it doesn't hurt, it doesn't help either").

I remember the sessions with the monk-advisor. He started to see me after I had gotten somewhat stronger. These thirty minute sessions, about every second day, turned into an unpleasant 'cat and mouse' game. I was aware that this middle-aged professional tried to help me, but I was not going to trust him. He always started by asking me: "What is troubling you, son?" I always answered: "I'm impatient to get back to my outfit, to defend the fatherland." He kept saying that he could not release me before my mind was healed. I thought that is fine with me, I don't want to go back there anyhow.

Helga from Graz, Austria

There were four beds in the room. Most patients in the treatment center stayed for several weeks and we got very well acquainted with our room-mates. One of these room-mates was a Lieutenant Gernod Kreutzer. He was a platoon leader in a bicycle company. I had never known that there were soldiers fighting on bicycles. He had hit a land-mine while riding his bicycle, and he was very lucky. Instead of losing his legs he just injured his knees, making both legs stiff. No more bicycles for Gernod.

He also was heavily 'shell-shocked', which was the reason for his being in the treatment center. Gernod was an Austrian, born and brought up in Graz. He was three years older than I. He had started to study mining-engineering at the university, before he was inducted. We liked each other.

Then his sister Helga came to visit him. She was blond, had a ringing laugh, and was my age. Helga spent a week visiting Gernod, but I think she never even noticed that he was there. She invited me to come to Graz and to spend my vacation there, after my release from the treatment center. She was fascinated with having met an ethnic German: "How exiting."

By the first week of June I had run out of all pretenses of still needing treatment. I was released from the treatment center. I had been there for some twelve weeks. This was about a month longer than the average patient's stay. I phoned Potsdam and obtained permission to take a two-week vacation. For one week I was going to vacation in Graz, Austria. The second week I reserved to visit with my brother in Sevastopol, on the Crimean peninsula.

Frau Kreutzer, Gernod and Helga's mother was a librarian, working for the city administration. She was a nice lady and an excellent diplomat. She treated me as Gernod's friend, and: "Isn't it wonderful, Helga will show you Graz, since you have never been here before." With so many young German men killed or maimed in the war, Mrs. Kreutzer was not going to stand in her daughters way to investigate future possibilities.

There was no Mr. Kreutzer. He had divorced Mrs. Kreutzer many years ago and dropped out-of-sight. The thought occurred: "Could he have been Jewish?" I looked at Helga and remembered Gernod - not a chance.

After a pleasant and restful week in Graz I promised to keep in touch by writing (which I did). Then I started on the long trip to visit Heinz in Sevastopol.

Finally Odessa, Ukraine

The German counter offensive on the Eastern Front had started on June 5. Again, the railroad was clogged

by troops and matériel movements. It was a long and tedious trip to Sevastopol. To get there, I first went through Odessa and checked in at the propaganda company.

The outfit was quartered in the suburbs. Captain Richtenhof told me that after returning from my visit with Heinz, I was to check-in with the Agricultural Mission in Tiraspol. I was to open a propaganda company branch office in this town, located about one hundred miles west of Odessa.

The assignment away from the beautiful city of Odessa was a disappointment. I had looked forward to spending some time in this Ukrainian seaport, located on a semi-circular bay, at the north-western end of the Black Sea. Odessa had a population of close to half a million in 1943. It was populated by a mix of people that included Turks, Armenians, Rumanians, and Moors. Only about half of the population were Ukrainians or Russians. At the time of its occupation by German and Rumanian troops in 1941, some forty thousand Jews lived in Odessa. Only a very few survived the occupation.

The town is picturesquely situated on a plateau 150 feet above sea-level. It is intersected by ravines and forms the end of the steppe region. The climate is milder than that of the rest of the Ukraine. Near Odessa are many health resorts. They dispensed waters containing concentrated salt solutions, with high proportions of magnesium, iodine and bromine.

During World War II Odessa played a very considerable role. It had great strategic and economic importance, not only for the Ukraine, but for the entire U.S.S.R. This made it necessary for the invading Germans to take possession of it quickly, to secure their flanks. Odessa was used as a basis for expansion over the Ukrainian industrial and mining area and the North Caucasian region. Besieged by German and Rumanian troops, Odessa fell after a gallant defense, on October 16, 1941. It was liberated by the Red Army during the great German retreat in 1944.

My next stop was with Heinz in Sevastopol. This natural harbor on the southern coast of the Crimean peninsula had a population of just below 100,000, with a sizable portion of Tatars and Mongols.

Heinz was working with several civilian employees. One of them was an officer of the Vlassow army (the Ukrainian Quislings). His name was Kassian Kopsanow and he was about twenty years older than Heinz. We met him again, some years later in Salzburg. Heinz helped him to come to the U.S. Kopsanow assumed the name Casy Kopp and became a friend of our families.

Silk For Parachutes

After about a week with Heinz I had to start my new assignment in Tiraspol. This was a small town, about the size of Orekhov. It had some agricultural importance because of the silk-worm plantation and silk-fiber factory. A small detachment of German agricultural specialists had an office there, to supervise this plant, which employed about two thousand workers. Their main task was to make sure that its output did not disappear into the black market. In the time, before the commercial availability of Nylon, silk was a much desired fiber. It was the only material suitable for the production of parachutes.

Besides the mulberry trees for the silk-moth, many kinds of other agricultural products are cultivated in the region, which borders on the rich earth of Moldavia. There were many cooperatives and no shortages in food, or money. The products that could be withheld, illegally, from the state controlled collection offices were sold for good prices on the black market in Odessa.

I operated with the help of two civilian employees, from a tiny office in the back-room of a requisitioned farmhouse. Our task was the distribution of posters and placards. This material was printed in

Poland. It was in the Ukrainian or Tartar language, often with many mistakes and of rather poor printing quality. This did not matter, since it was eagerly accepted by the cooperatives. I knew, that the material was not used as intended, that is, to be posted on the bulletin boards. The cooperatives used it as packing material, which was very scarce.

Distributing a few thousand placards took about an hour. We did that twice each month. Besides this, I had absolutely nothing else to do. This was fine with me.

Every month I traveled to Odessa, to the company headquarters. Usually I was able to get a ride on the back-seat of a motorbike. The driver was one of the German agricultural advisors. He was a civilian employee, just like Heinz and I used to be at MGHQ. The difference was that he was a real German.

Once, during this time period, Heinz came visiting. He drove a borrowed motorbike for over three hundred miles between Sevastopol and Odessa. This distance did not face him a bit. We had a few enjoyable days together in Odessa.

During this visit we discussed what we would do, after the collapse of the German war machine. We came to the conclusion that Helga in Graz could serve as the mail drop for communications between us. Whoever got back to Austria first would leave a letter with Helga. That would enable us to find each other quickly. It turned out later, that this was a very efficient plan.

As the hot summer month came to a close, by the end of August 1943 it became clear that the German counter offensive had fizzled. We heard, through the grape-vine, that the German forces were badly beaten on August 5. They lost the important city of Byelograd, which forced them to give up Kharkov. The newly established front was less than four hundred miles away, by end of August. This made all German administration bureaucrats quite uncomfortable.

In January 1944 the German resistance to the skillfully executed Russian re-conquering drives was faltering. The Red Army was gaining ground in the Middle-Ukraine, almost re-taking Kiev.

The Odessa part of the propaganda company received orders to withdraw to some point four hundred miles north-west of Odessa. We were to be shipped back to Potsdam, Germany. I depended on transportation by the agricultural agency. These civilians took their time getting back to Germany. We stopped off at different places, for a week at a time. It was well into the month of March until I arrived at the *Wehrmacht* Reserves Center in Potsdam, Germany.

By that time Captain Richtenhof's propaganda company had been transferred to Oslo, in German-occupied Norway. My orders were to escort a large shipment of material to Oslo. This material was being assembled in Warnemünde, near Rostock on the Baltic Sea.

8.

Oslo, Norway

Norway, in concert with the two other Scandinavian countries, proclaimed a policy of strict neutrality upon the outbreak of World War II in 1939. In February 1940 British naval forces entered Norwegian territorial waters to rescue Allied prisoners from the German vessel *Altmark*, which had taken refuge in the Jössing fjord. On April 8 the Allies went further and announced the mining of various points in Norwegian territorial waters, to interrupt the German lines of supply.

Germany invaded Norway on April 9, 1940. This event found the Norwegian people completely unprepared, in spite of their knowledge, that Adolf Hitler considered a German occupation as early as October 1939. Hitler adopted a plan to occupy Norway by the middle of January 1940, right after an interview with the Norwegian traitor Vidkun Quisling.

The Germans were remarkably slow in grasping the extent of the antagonism that they caused in the Norwegian population. They made a particularly serious mistake in the support that they insisted on giving to Quisling and his party. *Quislings* were despised by all but a negligible fraction of the Norwegian population, which did not deter the Germans from raising Quisling to the position of Norway's *Minister President* on February 1, 1942. They also appointed the Nazi bureaucrat Josef Terboven as *Reichskommissar*.

Both of these German appointees paid with their lives for these honors. Terboven committed suicide on May 9, 1945 and Quisling was executed by Norwegians October 24, 1945, after Norway had been liberated by the Allied Forces.

As time went on, the Norwegian people grew more and more united in opposition to the German occupying power. A home front grew spontaneously from the uncoordinated efforts of individuals and became increasingly organized under a central leadership. The members of this partisan movement were soon in continuous touch with the Norwegian government in England. A large number of "illegal" news-sheets spread Allied propaganda in occupied Norway and Denmark.

The Germans maintained several large prisoner-of-war (PW) camps near Oslo and Trondheim. They held under very severe conditions of near starvation rations, more than 160,000 men, mostly taken on the Eastern Fronts.

For some unexplained reasons the world has never acknowledged, that the Germans destroyed through hunger and neglect nearly 3 million prisoners of war, most of which came from the Eastern Front. This is in addition to the more than 6 million Jews that were slaughtered.

Besides the PW camps, there were more than 40,000 Russian and Ukrainian conscripted laborers held by the Germans in Norway. These laborers were all females, housed in some 16 camps. Most camps were located near large manufacturing centers and agricultural complexes.

I learned some of these facts after I arrived in Oslo in May of 1944. Traveling on a freight steamer from Warnemünde, it had taken about four days to traverse roughly 600 nautical miles to this principal port and capital of Norway.

Oslo lies in a natural basin, surrounded by pine-wooded hills, on the southern shore, at the head of the Oslo fjord. Its population in 1944 was over 300,000. It is a credit to the Norwegian and Danish populations that of the roughly fifty thousand Jews, that lived in Norway and Denmark before the German occupation, almost all were helped to escape to Sweden.

During the German occupation the city had suffered little material damage. Many of its downtown buildings stem from the years 1840 to 1860. They are similar to

the substantial and ornate buildings of other European capitals. The German occupation forces were very visible. Many office buildings and hotels served as headquarters for German units. German uniformed personnel could be seen everywhere.

Most Norwegians had perfected their tactic of treating the Germans as if they did not exist. The Norwegian's life went on, within the imposed restrictions of curfews and food rationing, as if there were no war or occupation. The stores opened every weekday morning, even though there was very little to sell. The offices, factories, schools, etc. kept functioning.

There were even some items available in Norway that could not be bought in Germany. One of them was fish and seafood in its various forms. Restaurants served lobsters, shark steaks and herring. The most delicious smoked herring was freely available for very little money. Five kilo-kegs (11 pounds) of herring, preserved in salt-brine, was a favorite gift item. German occupation troops bought these kegs and sent them home to relatives on short food rations. I sent one to Helga in Graz.

Jewish Disorder

The headquarters's offices of the propaganda company were located in an eight-story office building on one of Oslo's main thoroughfares. The offices occupied half of the fifth floor of this large commercial building.

The headquarters's barracks were an elementary school that had been converted to house the roughly two-hundred NCs and enlisted men. The CO and four officers lived in a small, nearby, suburban hotel. All this was located in a suburb and could be reached by using the electric light rail system, or by automobile.

Weekdays mornings, all set out for the downtown offices, except a Lieutenant and a handful enlisted men. The Lieutenant's name was Haber. He was the officer on day-duty at the barracks. He supervised the Norwegian cleaning crews, and run the household. He also scheduled the guard duty.

It was Lieutenant Haber's stated ambition to give the propaganda company some semblance of a military operation, rather than "an assembly of lazy bureaucrats." Normally most of these duties fall to the Sergeant Major. There was, to our amazement, a bitter tug-of-war going on between Lieutenant Haber and Sergeant Major Hellerstein.

Generally Lieutenant Haber was well respected. He was just about my age, maybe a year or two older. He came from Leoben, Austria. Haber was of slight statue and carried himself very erect. He had lost all fingers of the left hand and the thumb on the right hand from frostbite in the battle of Stalingrad. Like many patriotic soldiers, he had volunteered to continue to serve in the *Wehrmacht* in spite of being an invalid. He wore the brown leather gloves on his hands like a badge of honor.

Just about two weeks after my arrival Lieutenant Haber stopped me one morning, just as I was leaving for downtown. "Walter," he said in a loud angry voice, "I don't like the Jewish mess and disorder of your corner. You better clean it up right now." "Yes sir," was the only respond that I could manage, while some cold sweat started to run down my spine.

My cot was in a room that I shared with three NCs. Each person had besides his cot a narrow table, a chair, and a locker (about 20x20 inch x 5 foot). It was each occupants' responsibility to make-up his cot in the morning, in a prescribed military fashion. All belongings were kept neatly stacked in the locker. The cleaning of floors, windows, toilets and bathrooms was the responsibility of the civilian cleaning crews.

I returned to my room and inspected my cot and locker. Both, the cot and the locker were messed up, as if someone had searched for something. I straightened it all out and went to the office, trying to forget the incident.

My work at the office consisted of helping a Lieutenant who was in charge of the recreational activities in the conscripted labor camps. He supervised the volunteer recreational committees in these camps and appropriated recreational materials. The materials included Hungarian-made guitars, German-made mouth-harmonicas, Italian-made accordions, and sheet music, and phonograph records. All these materials had come with the shipment that I had accompanied from Warnemünde.

Most Russian and Ukrainian volunteer committee women spoke some German by now. They often wrote letters and reports in their native languages. It was my responsibility to translate the letters and reports into German.

Hardly a week after the first confrontation by Lieutenant Haber, came a second one, which worried me even more. He confronted me, just as I entered the yard of the barracks. I was coming back from the city, and it was about 2000. It was still light. In Norway the days are already quite long in June.

I saluted Lieutenant Haber, as I had to. Instead of returning my salute, which is the custom, he stopped in front of me and stuck his face close to mine. I could smell the alcohol on his breath. "That's no salute, you Jewish swine," he hissed in my face. "You think you can fool me, you damn Jew. I can smell a Jew from one hundred meters. You smell like one, you look like one, you are a Jew! I haven't lost my fingers for nothing! I'm going to get you, you Jewish swine!"

He then passed by me and walked unsteadily toward the street exit. While still stunned from the encounter I noticed Sergeant Major Hellerstein standing near a

parked vehicle. "The Lieutenant is in no condition to walk out on the street, Sergeant Major," I said.

"I know, I've seen and heard the whole thing," said Sergeant Major. "I also saw you putting your hand on your gun," he said. It was true. Instinctively I had put my right hand on the holster that carried my handgun. My hand was still resting there. I have no idea if I would have used my weapon, if further provoked. I'm glad that it never came to the test.

"I'll talk to Captain Richtenhof tonight. We have to get you out of Haber's command immediately, or anything is likely to happen. Now, I'll see to it that our drunken hero gets to his hotel, without catching any more Jews, dragons, or monsters." Sergeant Major placed his hand ever so lightly on my shoulder and winked at me. He left quickly to catch up with the Lieutenant.

Next day, shortly before noon, Captain Richtenhof phoned me at the office. "Walter," he said, "we will be taking on much more work. I have decided to let a few men take up quarters right here in the office building. There are several small apartments on the second floor. I have told Hellerstein to send your stuff to apartment 204C. You can get the key from the building guard. If you need anything tell Hellerstein."

That is how I came to live in a tiny apartment, all by myself, in the office building, in downtown Oslo. The apartment consisted of an office, bedroom, bathroom, and a four by four foot kitchenette. The apartment was cleaned and serviced by the building's cleaning crew. I got a radio, some books, and even a picture on the wall. It turned out to be an excellent place to wait out the end of the war.

Communications Assistant Raubal

The telephone was an important tool for our day-by-day work. In the days before automatic dialing each

call had to be placed through a telephone operator. The speed and efficiency with which long-distance connections were made depended mostly on the skill of the operator. The friendliness of the operator certainly made work more pleasant.

The telephone operators belonged to the Corps of Communication Assistants, an Army unit of uniformed females. The Navy and the Air Force had similar units. Besides the Corps of Medical Nurses these were the only females in the *Wehrmacht*.

After a few weeks of work the telephone operators knew the parties, that usually were in communication with each other. One only had to ask for them by name, making it unnecessary to give more detailed addresses or routing instructions. I knew the voices of the regular operators.

Some times a new operator's voice came from the switchboard. This new temporary operator usually was substituting for a vacationing or sick regular. One such substitute operator was Miss Raubal. I heard her voice and I was curious to see who this new lady was. I told her that my office was just a short distance from the switchboard, in the same building. Would she meet me?

She agreed to meet with me and I was delighted. She was just a few months younger than me. She was short and just a little less than chubby. With sparkling greenish-gray eyes, a beautiful, round, dimpled face, and with the brightest smile I had ever seen, she captured my heart.

A week or so after I had met Communications Assistant Hedl Raubal I was ordered back to Potsdam for six weeks of military refresher training. During these boring days in Potsdam Hedl was constantly on my mind and I realized that I had fallen in love. We exchanged cautious letters. Neither of us was ready to reveal our feelings.

I did a lot of soul-searching during that time and later, after I returned to my assignment in Norway. Could I reveal my real identity, could I trust her? Could I go on and meet with her, without revealing my identity? It was a real dilemma.

After I returned to Oslo we started to meet several times during the week. We also spend time together on Sundays. Our favorite spots were in the beautiful woods and mountain resort areas around Oslo. Blueberries and cranberries grow there in abundance and provide delicious snacks for starry-eyed, young lovers.

Norway Liberated

As the year 1944 ended it became more and more evident that Germany's Eastern Front was collapsing at an ever increasing rate. I was very worried about Heinz, since I had not received word from him for several months by now. I heard about the liberation of Odessa and Sevastopol by the Red Army and the disorderly retreat of the Germans through Moldavia and Rumania.

Some German officers arrived in Norway during this time, without apparent duties or purposes. Officers that had connections at the High Command tried to get as far away as possible from the Russian front. It was much preferable to capitulate to the Western Allied Forces than to the Red Army. Most high-ranking officers were convinced that capitulation was now only a matter of time.

The Norwegian partisans became more active and effective. For uniformed Germans it became dangerous to walk after dark in the streets of Oslo. During the winter month Oslo has short days. The city took on the atmosphere of a sinister armed camp.

On May 5, 1945, almost exactly one year after I had first arrived in Oslo, the German command capitulated, without a fight, to the Western Allied

Forces. I was in my office at noon, when the announcement of the capitulation came, over the Wehrmacht radio station. I had been waiting for this announcement and was prepared for it. I opened a quart-sized bottle of Aquavit, and finished about half of it, drinking right from the bottle. I did not make it to my bed, as I had planned.

Around 1800 Hedl found me laying on the floor of the office, where I had passed out. She came looking for me when I did not show up to meet with her, as we had arranged. Hedl got me to my cot and we had a long talk. I told her, in a sketchy way, who I was and I asked her if she would marry me. She promised me that she would give me her answer soon.

Two days later, on May 7, 1945 General Alfred Jodel and Admiral Hans von Friedenburg signed at Reims the unconditional surrender of Germany. They had taken command of the German armed forces, after Hitler killed himself in his bunker in Berlin on April 30.

Within weeks all German troops were removed from the Norwegian cities and collected in holding camps in the country side. The policing of the withdrawal and keeping order in the camps was performed by the Germans themselves. We hardly saw Allied soldiers. Officers went into different camps than noncommissioned officers and enlisted men. For the first few months the Germans kept their arms. They were collected later by the Allies.

The Propaganda Company was ordered into a camp that was located some thirty miles south of Oslo. The Corps of Communication Assistants, that Hedl belonged to, was ordered into a camp located a few miles north of Oslo. Just as we were about to get separated Hedl agreed to marry me, as soon as it could be arranged.

We got married June 28. I arrived at her camp the day before the marriage ceremony. Hedl's room-mates were busy sewing a wedding dress from some white bed-sheets. They did not have a pattern to go by. The wedding dress came out looking more like a tight-fitting

nurses uniform, all done in sturdy linen and good for at least a dozen weddings. However, the radiance of the bride made the wedding-dress look as if it came from the most elegant shop in Berlin.

The wedding-hall was a dormitory room decorated with bunches of wild flowers, picked by Hedl's room-mates in the surrounding woods. A supply sergeant, that we both knew, was the best man. One of Hedl's friends was the maid of honor. The rings were gold-plated brass, purchased in Oslo some days earlier. The service was celebrated by a military judge from the near-by officers camp. There was even a wedding cake, thoughtfully provided by the camp's cooks.

We stayed one week in a wedding cottage, off the beaten track, in Hedl's camp. Then we traveled back to my camp where we were assigned our own room to live in. We were one of the few married couples in camp. I often think about this wedding. It was the smartest thing I ever did.

Repatriation

In preparation of being sent back to Germany all members of the *Wehrmacht* received from their company's personnel administrators, a document that was called *Wehrpass* (Military Passport). It was a passport-sized booklet that contained their personal statistics. These included the name, place and date of birth, civilian address, residences and names of next of kin, where and what schools attended, place and date of induction, military training, promotions, medals, campaign ribbons, commendations, disciplinary actions, health record, inoculations, etc.

The *Wehrpass* was normally kept by the unit's personnel administrator. It was separate from, and in addition to the soldier's I.D. booklet, which each person always carried on him/her. The I.D. booklet only lists the name, rank, serial number and birth date. We

were told that both of these documents will have to be presented to the discharging agency in Germany.

I had known of the existence of the *Wehrpass* but had never had one in my hands. When mine was handed to me I was shocked to note it's completeness. It listed as my birthplace and place of permanent residence the U.S.S.R. It faithfully recorded all the bogus data that I had fabricated at the time of my nationalization.

In the camp I had heard many horror stories about the Russian Repatriation Commission. From my personal knowledge of the Russians, I had no reason to doubt the veracity of these stories. The commission had arrived in Oslo a few days after the German's capitulation. The Russian commission's task was the repatriation of the Russian PWs and East-Laborers. Their first action was, however, to kill all Russian traitors. Any PW, or laborer, that collaborated with the Germans, in any fashion, was a traitor.

I shuddered to think of all the volunteer women in the entertainment committees. They had freely given of their time and energy to lighten their comrades plight. They had organized song- and theater- groups, using material that they obtained from the Germans. I was very much afraid, that the types of *Commissars* that I had met in Lwów, would not hesitate to classify these poor souls as traitors. In fact, hundreds, and may be thousands of Russian/Ukrainian repatriates were either killed on the spot, or brought back to Russia in chains, to stand trial for cooperating with the Germans.

One day I saw a group of uniformed Russians in our camp's office, talking with the officer-of-the-day. After they left I walked into the office. "They did not look like English or American soldiers to me," I said, "who were they?" "Oh, they were Russians. They wanted to know if we had any Vlassow soldiers, Russian PWs or East-Laborers hiding in the camp. They will be back to make inspections from time to time," said the Sergeant.

In my mind I could see the scenario: Everyone standing in formation in the camp's yard. A Russian

Captain and two Russian functionaries of the State Police go from person to person and examine their Wehrpass. They come to me. "Ho, ho, we got one traitor here!" says the Captain. I'm grabbed and . . .

There was only one thing to do. I took my Wehrpass and slowly cut it into many little pieces. I decided that I'll say I never got mine. That will make it a German affair, and I was confident that I'll be able to deal with Germans.

After a few months in the camp near Höngefoss we moved into a larger camp near Holmestrand, awaiting transport by ship back to Germany. Finally toward the end of December we took the two-day boat ride to Hamburg, Germany. There we were put on trains, guarded by British soldiers, and transported to a processing camp in northern Germany.

It turned out that I was not the only one without a complete set of documents (my military passport was missing). There were others entirely without papers. Others had the validity or authenticity of their documents in question. We were separated from the others and held in a special, well guarded section of the camp. Hedl's papers were in order. Since she was with me, she was held in this prison section for one day and then released and discharged.

I was interrogated by a British security specialist. He listened carefully to my explanation, starting with Tarnopol and ending with Oslo. He took notes, and maintained the bored expression that no other national can match. Since it was just before Christmas he told me that nothing is going to happen until after the holidays. Hedl found a room with some farm family near the camp and we saw each other every day, through the wire fence.

Finally, one early morning, I was told to come to the camp's administration building for interrogation. There I was introduced to an American. He told me that he was a Captain in the OSS. I would not have guessed his rank, since he looked to me more like a Boy-Scout

than a military man. Captain Levine ("call me Sam") commented on my knowledge of English.

I started learning English at the age of six, when my parents engaged an "English Miss" in Vienna, to look after me and my two brothers. I never stopped taking lessons in the English language, until I finished high-school in Lwów, just at the beginning of the holocaust.

Captain Levine invited me to have breakfast with him and some other American security officers. I was used to a breakfast consisting of a bowl of warm cereal, or a slice of bread topped with marmalade. I was flabbergasted at the breakfast selection: Three different juices, soft boiled or scrambled eggs, ham, bacon and sausages, breads, rolls, cereals, etc. There was even real coffee!

With all this food it was surprising that all the Americans seemed to be ailing from deceases. I deducted that they do, from the multi-colored pills that each swallowed before they started to eat. I was not yet familiar with vitamin pills.

During the breakfast Captain Levine casually asked me to spell the first few letters of the Hebrew alphabet. I barely remembered four letters. "That's one more than I remember," said Captain Levine. Later he tested my knowledge of some Jewish religious customs. Toward the end of the breakfast he told me that he was satisfied. I would be released the following morning.

9.**Salzburg, Austria**

As soon as we were discharged Hedl and I carefully removed all military insignia from our uniforms. It struck me as being funny that I now was eager to get rid of these insignia. Just a short while ago I was scheming to be able to wear them.

Hedl's gray uniform, combined with a blouse or sweater and colorful scarf, made a neat civilian-looking combination. My uniform looked just what it was, a uniform with its insignia removed and worn without a belt. Almost all men between the ages of fourteen and sixty wore this combination now.

The next decision we had to make, was where to go after our discharge. One place Hedl was not going to, was to the village in Silesia, where her father, her stepmother, and several siblings lived. Silesia had become a province of Poland.

Hedl had joined the Communications Assistants Corps to get away from her hated stepmother. She would not have gone back there, even if her home had remained in Germany. She had become a displaced person, just as I was.

There was no reason for me to go back to Vienna, Austria. All my relatives were dead, or at least no longer there. Also, Vienna was occupied by the Soviets. I had no desire to get closer to them than I had to. Ultimately, we were going to join my brother Kurt in America. First I had to find Heinz. We decided to visit Helga in Graz and, if necessary, to stay there until we hear from Heinz.

Our discharge papers allowed the free use of trains. It also provided for access to accommodations near all major railroad terminals. We were in no great hurry and stopped off for a few days in Munich. Just like Hamburg, Munich was severely damaged from aerial warfare.

At the railroad station in Munich we saw a large group of German soldiers arriving back from Russian PW camps. It was a ghostly sight. Sick, broken, famished, emaciated figures, braced by canes, limping on feet wrapped in rags. Many had no shoes, in spite of the sub-zero temperature. The horrors of war. Will we ever learn?

From Munich we traveled straight to Graz, Austria. I probably should have phoned Helga. I should have announced my visit and warned her that I was now married and that I was bringing my new wife. Instead we just appeared unannounced at the Kreutzer's door.

Mrs. Kreutzer answered the door bell. She displayed much tact and diplomacy. She welcomed us into the house and immediately told us, that Helga was happily engaged to be married to a young man. "At this moment Helga is at the hospital visiting with her fiancée. He is being fitted with a prothesis for his left foot. I'll just phone her, so she knows you are here," she said. Gernod, her son, had not yet returned home. Some time later I heard, that Gernod had been killed on the Eastern Front.

At Helga's house a letter from Heinz was waiting for me. It had arrived several months earlier. Heinz was in Salzburg. He wrote that he had a good job at the American radio station. I was to contact him immediately and come to Salzburg as soon as possible. I phoned him from Helga's house and told him that we'll be in Salzburg the next day.

Heinz had also written to the Kreutzers. Somehow Mrs. Kreutzer and Helga deduced that we are Jews. Helga was by far not as gracious as her mother. She found it necessary to lecture me about deception and

unfairness. Like most Germans and Austrians, Helga claimed that she had no responsibility for the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis. After all, she had turned her head and had chosen not to see or hear the cries of the victims. Her complaints about my unfair deception reminded me of the story about the henchman during the French revolution:

"The henchman cursed his aristocratic victims for being unconsidered. They carelessly spattered their blood all over his guillotine, as their heads rolled into the sand."

KZ Committee

Heinz was very well established in Salzburg. He even had an automobile. It was a tiny two-stroke Fiat Doppolino. This added to his status and was quite an achievement. He had arrived about a half year earlier. Now he was the director of news casts for the radio station serving the American-occupied sector of Austria.

He lived in a rented room, in the center of the lovely city of Salzburg. The lady that owned the apartment fortunately could make an additional room available. He arranged for us to move right in.

As far as Jews were concerned, Salzburg was much the same as other German and Austrian cities. Practically none of the local Jews had returned. A group of Jewish concentration camp survivors had chosen the city as a temporary domicile. Most of these Jews originally came from Poland. They were full of festering hatred for the crimes committed against them and their families. It was here that I heard for the first time the Jewish slogan "Never Again!"

Before 1938 there were about 18,000 Jews in Salzburg. Some of the histories of these Jewish families in Salzburg went back to the sixteens century and earlier. Salzburg was founded by the Romans as a

military outpost around the first century A.D. It is said that there were Jews in the ranks of the Roman soldiers.

Now, in this city, with a population of about 300,000, there were only some four hundred Jewish transients. They were housed in a small compound of apartments, that they had duped Little Israel.

Many of the Jewish transients were still hoping to find members of their family, which may have survived. Generally, they had not made up their mind where they wanted to settle. It was a foregone conclusion that none would stay in Salzburg. Most would finally wind up in Israel or America.

Having gone through the hell of the holocaust, the Jewish survivors were quite militant. Only the toughest and strongest had made it. If there ever were any weaknesses or fears, this group had now none of such. The occupants of Salzburg's Little Israel were mostly between 20 and 30 years of age. There were only a few females and no children.

The survivors had set up a committee to regulate their lives and to deal with the Gentile authorities. The committee's name was The KZ Committee. It took the initials KZ from the German abbreviation for concentration camp.

The occupation authorities supported the KZ Committee with gifts of food and money. The food came mostly in the form of U.S. Army K-rations and from early distributions of "CARE" packages. The Austrian authorities did not dare to deny the KZ Committee's demands for preferential treatment in the distribution of housing permits, clothing-, and food-ration coupons.

Heinz had registered with the KZ Committee, when he first arrived in Salzburg, shortly after the end of the war. In his self-reliant manner he had not bothered much with the committee since he had soon obtained work from the American occupation forces, which led to his post with the radio station.

I went to the KZ Committee office to register our arrival and was received with great warmth. I was given a hand-full of ration cards and an arm-full of K-rations. I met several members of the committee and other survivors, that happened to be in the office. All were congenial people of high intelligence and with best intentions.

"What camp were you released from?" I was asked in a mixture of Yiddish and German. "I was not in a camp," I answered in Yiddish. "Not in a camp? How did you survive?" - "I was hiding, underground" - "Underground? Were? Not with the Polish, they killed off all Jews in the woods. With the Russian Partisans? How did you escape from Russia?"

Another member of the committee asked: "Your application states that your last place of residence was Oslo, Norway. How does a Jew born in Vienna get to Oslo, Norway? You are a Jew, are you?" - At this point I started to feel quite uncomfortable and fear started to throttle my mind. There was no telling what could happen. It dawned on me that such questions, legitimate as they were, could not be answered, without lengthy explanations.

Fortunately, at this point a senior member of the committee cut into the conversation: "Gentlemen, we are not the GESTAPO. He survived. He is not the only one that made it through the underground. It probably was as hard to survive in the underground, as it was to survive a KZ. The Allied authorities have processed him, so he's OK."

I was relieved, but I was also very sad. There were such interesting people, so many potential good friends in Salzburg's Little Israel. However, I knew that I would not be welcomed there, since I just did not belong. Will this nightmare ever end?

With the help of the KZ Committee we moved into an empty apartment. It had been vacated by an evacuated German Nazi. I wondered who was now living in our

apartment in Vienna.

With special permits we purchased some furniture. We bought some pots and pans, some bed linens and blankets. Hedl became a homemaker. Heinz shared the apartment with us.

We received the first letter from Kurt, in New York. Later came a package with clothing, selected by Alice, Kurt's wife.

We applied for displaced persons immigration visas to the U.S.A. We were put on the waiting list by the American consulate in Munich, Germany. It was, by then, more than one year after the war had ended in Europe, but the U.S. was still not admitting Jewish survivors. Not even those that had close relatives in the U.S.

In the suspended status of an unwanted refugee, it was hard for me to understand the reasons for the American in-action. It reminded me of Vienna, in 1938. Many Jews waited in lines at the American consulate, right until they were liquidated by the Nazis. Was this in 1938, and in 1945 as well, because of an uncontrolled or lazy American bureaucracy? Or was it because of the thinly disguised anti-Semitism, which I had experienced with some of the American officials?

Lotte and Richard, our friends from Lwów, wrote Heinz at the radio station from Vienna, Austria - the Russian zone. They had escaped from the concentration camp in 1943 and had lived, in the underground, masquerading as a Polish couple of domestics. We were overjoyed and I visited them in Vienna, for a few days.

10.

New York

In the last week of May 1946 we were notified by the KZ Committee, that we were included in the first displaced persons transport to New York. Within a few days we found ourselves at the American consulate in Munich, filling out applications, undergoing medical examinations, and getting inoculated. Finally we received the most precious document: The Immigration Visa to the United States of America.

Once more we found ourselves on a train, this time together with Heinz. We slowly progressed towards the harbor of Hamburg. The train stopped at many German cities. It took on more singing, laughing, enthusiastic survivors of the holocaust. By the time we arrived in Hamburg around June 8, there were about one thousand men and a hand-full women ready to be loaded onto the Victory class troop-transport ship "Marine Flasher."

As we entered the ship each of us received one five-dollar bill. For some of this money we bought chocolate bars on board of the ship. Most of it we saved. We did not come to America as paupers.

The Statue of Liberty greeted us in New York Harbor on June 18. There were many fire-boats out, spraying water in the air. Some other boats had orchestras, playing in our honor.

We did not know what to make of it. Later our relatives explained that we were the first boat with Jewish World War II survivors arriving here. New York's major depended on the Jewish vote. He had ordered the festivities. For the holocaust survivors, this was the first of many strange experiences.

Two competing Jewish organizations were there to offer help with accommodations. It seemed that one, the HIAS organization, preferred orthodox Jews. The other one, the Council of Jewish Women, was looking for conservative Jews. I had forgotten that there are two Jewish religions: The orthodox and the conservative Jews.

Kurt and his wife Alice (Lizzi) were there to greet and welcome us. We did not need the help of these organizations. Kurt owned an automobile, what luxury! They took us straight from the harbor to their respectable apartment, in the Washington Heights District. Here lived many other well-to-do Jewish immigrants that had left Germany or Austria in or before 1938.

In the apartment many of Lizzi's relatives waited for us. Kurt's mother-in-law had prepared a festive dinner. Everyone wanted to know: "How did you survive?" Their facial expressions said: "Tell me in ten words or less. Then I get my turn to tell you about the hardships I endured, coming over here. I had so much baggage, and no one to carry it for me."

We managed to say: "We survived, isn't that enough . . ."